

An Analysis of Leadership Succession in International Schools:  
Novelty, Disruption, and a Path to Resolution

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## **Acknowledgement**

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## **Dedication**

To my beautiful wife Gena, this work would not exist without you. Saying “I do” was your most courageous act of faith; you recognized what could not be seen. This dissertation could only happen because of you. Your presence is fixed in this work in a thousand different ways. You cleared the way for me to complete this study. You gently pushed when I need pushing and you pulled when I lost traction. You celebrated every one of my achievements, and you provided space when I needed to contemplate disappointment. There are no words potent enough to express my gratitude. I honour you with this work and I love you.

## **Abstract**

This research project is an exploratory multiple sample study of three European international schools and utilizes semi-structured interviews to gather data to better understand the phenomenon of leadership succession events at the director level of the organization. The succession of leadership is a significant event in the life of an international school and is viewed as a novel event with disruptive strength. As such, Event System Theory is used as the theoretical framework to view and analyze the event of leadership succession. The purpose of this study is to determine recurring themes influencing the process of leadership succession in international schools. The following research questions assist to focus the study:

Q1. Within the boundaries of the three sample schools, what are the director and Board Chair person's perceptions and understandings of planning and management for director leadership succession events?

Q2. In what ways have past school leadership succession events been a disruptive influence in the life of the three sample schools, and what is the nature of the disruption?

Q3. In what ways are sample schools actively engaged in strategic succession planning, and what elements of that strategy, if any, have been effective?

From an analysis of data eight salient themes emerge: Certain change, Transition, Disruption, Strategic Succession Planning and Management, Internal Leadership Development, Necessary Conversations, Policymaking, and Deputy Director Appointment. Recommendations for practice are distilled from the analysis of data, which can help to moderate the disruptive effects of leadership succession for the benefit of the entire school community.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgement .....	i
Dedication.....	ii
Abstract .....	iii
List of Tables .....	vii
List of Figures.....	viii
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Statement of Study Purpose.....	4
Context of the Study.....	4
Rationale for the Study.....	6
Key Terms .....	9
Theoretical Framework .....	13
Potential Study Approach.....	15
Organization of Dissertation.....	16
Chapter Two: Literature Review .....	18
Introduction.....	18
Six Decades of Succession Research .....	20
Succession Planning and Management .....	23
International Schools.....	23
Executive Leadership in International Schools .....	30
Frequency of Executive Turnover.....	31
International School Executive Leadership Characteristics. ....	32
The Influence of Leadership on Student Achievement. ....	37
Unique Challenges of Executive Leadership in International Schools. ....	40
Political Challenge of Executive Leadership in International Schools. ....	41
International School Governance.....	43
Leadership succession in educational contexts.....	47
Event System Theory .....	50
Conclusion .....	56
Chapter Three: Meethodology and Methods.....	58
Introduction.....	58
Statement of study purpose and research questions.....	59
Researcher's Positionality and Value Premises.....	60

Study methodology .....	63
Research design and selected methods.....	65
Sample Study Methodology .....	68
Limitation and Objections to Case Study Research.....	69
Methods .....	75
Sample Selection.....	78
Data analysis strategies.....	88
Interview Protocol.....	89
Limitations.....	91
Conclusion .....	91
Chapter Four: Findings.....	93
Introduction.....	93
Review of methodology.....	95
Sample school selection and background.....	96
Review of data gathering and analysis procedures. ....	99
Event System Theory. ....	100
Findings .....	101
Research Question One.....	101
Research Question Two.....	124
Research Question Three.....	130
Conclusion .....	144
Chapter Five: Analysis and Recommendations.....	146
Introduction.....	146
Part One: Introduction to study foundation .....	147
Part 2: Summary and Analysis of Findings .....	148
Certain Change.....	150
Transition.....	153
Disruption .....	158
Strategic succession planning and management .....	164
Internal Leadership Development .....	166
Necessary Conversations .....	168
Policymaking .....	170
Deputy Director Appointment .....	171
Part three: Limitations Recommendations and Conclusion .....	173
Study Limitations .....	173
Recommendations for Practice .....	176
Recommendations for Research.....	181
Conclusion .....	183
References .....	186

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: Percentage of schools on each continent seeking leaders of various style...	35
Table 2: Percentage of schools in search of various leader types by time period.....	36
Table 3: Possible sample schools for study inclusion.....	80
Table 4: Sample schools to be considered after criterion reference.....	83
Table 5: Final list of sample schools after criterion reference.....	84
Table 6: Sample schools.....	97



## List of Figures

Figure 1: Number of schools by region.....	7
Figure 2: Global forecast of the number of international schools to 2026.....	8
Figure 3: Forecast of student enrolment in millions to 2026.....	8
Figure 4: Basic Open System Theory Model.....	51
Figure 5: The three identities of the researcher.....	61
Figure 6: Interactive model of research design.....	66

“Le roi est mort, vive le roi!”

The king is dead, long live the king!

First declared upon the accession to the French throne of Charles VII  
after the death of his father Charles VI in 1422.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

“One of the most significant events in the life of a school is a change in its leadership. Yet few things in education succeed less than leadership succession” (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 163)

### **Introduction**

The change of senior leadership in an international school can be an opportunity for growth and school improvement, as well as a source of great anxiety and instability for the school community (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012; Grusky, 1960). Andy Hargreaves indicates, “Leadership succession is not just a temporary episodic problem in individual schools, but a pervasive crisis in the system” (2005, p. 164). Dean Fink (2006) writes, “Succession is now a chronic process rather than an episodic crisis” (p. 62).

Change is inevitable, and the event of leadership succession mirrors that inevitability. When change does occur, some organizations are able to adapt better than others. Planned change is manageable, but the unpredictable nature of unanticipated change can be destabilizing. Logic suggests that every leader will leave the organization at some point in time. Moreover, all leaders will leave their positions for one of three reasons: they leave their position by choice, they leave because they are terminated, or they die; the details surrounding their leaving may be open for discussion, that they will ultimately leave is not. Oscar Grusky (1960) was the first researcher to identify key relatable variables in executive succession (Kresner & Sebor, 1994). Grusky’s 1960 study in administrative succession established the importance of the field when he noted that succession is important to understand for two fundamental reasons: succession is a universal constant for all organizations, and

administrative succession inevitably leads to organizational instability (p. 105). These two fundamental constants seem to be as valid today as they were in Grusky's time.

Fink (2006) identifies several critical issues in western educational organizations and characterizes them as a simmering crisis. The partial but significant list of issues undermining initiatives for school improvement include standardization, high-stakes testing, the shifting demographics of baby boomers, and a weak inflow of quality leadership candidates willing to lead (p. 62). In the light of Fink's potent list, mismanaged leadership succession is only one of a host of problems. Nevertheless, critical issues rarely exist in isolation; it is more often the norm that the emergence of one issue inevitably leads to a multitude of other interconnected problems.

Furthermore, problems in education leadership can dampen student achievement (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012; Ronfeldt, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2013; Heck & Hallinger, 2014). The fundamental *raison d'être* of general schooling is to ensure that all students learn at the highest possible level of achievement (DuFour & Marzano, 2015). If mismanaged leadership succession is understood to negatively influence student achievement, then there is first a need to understand the challenges of problem of mismanaged leadership succession, and then to carefully and purposely create policy by which to forecast and plan for leadership succession for the betterment of the entire school.

Rothwell (2016) adds a note of refinement to the call for succession planning when he suggests what is really needed is succession planning and management. According to Rothwell (2016), succession planning and management is the process of stabilizing the tenure of key personnel to ensure the continued effective performance of the organization by providing for the development, replacement, and strategic application of key people (p. 6). Rothwell's definition is echoed in the principles of

Organizational Development (OD). The OD field is based on two fundamental beliefs: first that change is inevitable, and second that having a plan to manage change will help the organization be more competitive, and ultimately, more effective (Smither, Houston, & McIntire, 2016). In light of Rothwell's definition of succession planning and management, it is evident that the two beliefs of OD are more than compatible with the principles of succession planning and management.

Rothwell's call for succession planning and management underscores an increasing awareness that succession is much more than a simple balancing of the leadership equation. If succession were an uncomplicated exchange of one body for another, then anybody with a reasonable resume would do. However, the problem of succession is much more systemic than meets the eye; when experienced leaders leave, the tangible loss of capacity to do the work is the least of the associated problems. The very real cost to the organization of unmanaged succession is the unanticipated loss of accumulated wisdom and institutional memory, which leaves with the departing leader (Rothwell, 2016).

In addition, implications of unmanaged succession are not restricted to the top of the organizational chart. Succession planning must also involve the careful and thoughtful planning necessary for replacing key staff at all levels of the organization. While the executive level of the organization provides strategic leadership, key individuals at all levels of the organization are responsible for cultivating enduring social relationships with important contacts in the organizational community (Rothwell, 2016). The lack of a coherent succession plan is a significant signal to the wider community of a deficiency in strategic planning and an absence of leadership vision.

## **Statement of Study Purpose**

Succession planning and management in international schools is affected jointly by the senior leadership and the governing body of the school. It is their combined understandings and perceptions of the necessity of succession planning and management that drives the planning forward (Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine recurring themes influencing the process of leadership succession in international schools. For clarity and simplicity, the senior executive educational leader, operating under a variety of job titles clarified in the section titled key terms, is known from here on as the school director, and the governing body represented by the board chairperson provide the main body of information for this study. The following research questions assist to focus the study:

Q1. Within the boundaries of the three sample schools, what are the director and Board Chair person's perceptions and understandings of planning and management for director leadership succession events?

Q2. In what ways have past school leadership succession events been a disruptive influence in the life of the three sample schools, and what is the nature of the disruption?

Q3. In what ways are sample schools actively engaged in strategic succession planning, and what elements of that strategy, if any, have been effective?

## **Context of the Study**

The contextual location for this study is the modern international school. As of May, 2017, there are 8712 entities operating globally as international schools (ISC, 2017). To fully appreciate the scale of the current growth rate in the international school industry, there were 8178 international schools operating globally at the previous count in May 2016 (ISC, 2016); over 500 new schools added in one year.

Hallgarten, Tabberer, & McCarthy (2015) suggest the modern incarnation of international schools are an excellent example of a 20<sup>th</sup> century cultural artifact: “sufficiently coherent in ethos and practice to make a unique contribution to the education landscape, whilst conceptually diverse enough for people to contrive their own image” (p. 2). Secured by four key elements, an international mix of students, international governance, a highly mobile and internationally-minded teaching force, and an international-centered curriculum, the 20<sup>th</sup> century international school is a success by any objective measure (Hallgarten et al., 2015; Waterson, 2016).

The earliest example of such a school dates back to 1890, when the Anglican Diocese of Bloemfontein helped to establish the European School of Maseru, in what is now modern Lesotho. This school educated the children of British administrative officials, missionaries as well as traders. Today, that same school is known as Maseru English Medium Preparatory School (Hayden and Thompson, 2013). However, the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked the commencement of a chain of events that would fundamentally redefine an era. In 1924, the International School of Geneva (EcoLint) opened its doors as an educational response to the unprecedented tragedy of the First World War, and as a practical response to the educational requirements of children of the League of Nation employees. EcoLint represents the first iteration of the modern international school (Hallgarten et al., 2015).

International schools have become increasingly difficult to define accurately due to a number of key reasons: the impressive growth of these schools; the question of whether an ad hoc collection of international schools constitute a system or an industry; the rising diversity among school types, settings, and clientele, and the use of the value-laden and increasingly contested term *international* in the title of many of these schools (Bray, 2007; Bunnell, Fertig, & James, 2016; Hayden and Thompson,

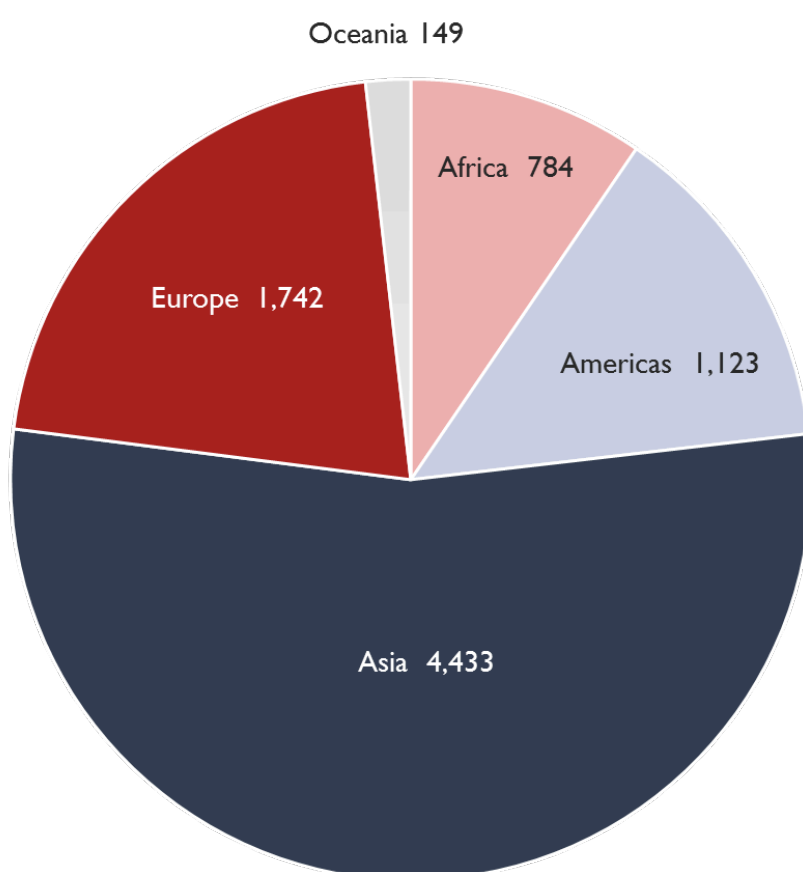
2016; Keller, 2015). Globalization and the commodification of education have given rise to unparalleled growth in both the number of schools currently operating and, by extension, the number of students attending these institutions (Hallgarten et al., 2015; Waterson, 2016). Furthermore, increasingly complex manifestations of these schools have made the modern international school highly resistant to a compact all-encompassing definition. Hayden and Thompson (2008) have attempted to provide some guidance on this issue as they indicate that the problem of defining these schools is largely due to the lack of a common agreement over what qualifies as an international school; the unregulated nature of these schools, the fact that many of these schools do not use the term international in their title, and the prodigious global growth of these schools in a relatively short time frame makes identification problematic (p.19). A deeper and more thorough analysis of the types, nature, contentions, and the 21<sup>st</sup> century evolution of international schools will be provided in review of literature in Chapter Two.

### **Rationale for the Study**

Andy Hargreaves speaks to the ad hoc nature of leadership succession when he states, “Succession is rarely planned and prepared for in advance; it is usually a reactive, rushed-together process” (Fink, 2010, p. xii). Leadership turnover in an international school is inevitable, however schools experiencing too frequent turnover are known to suffer from a lack of shared purpose, cynicism among teaching staff, and an inability to maintain a school improvement focus over any meaningful time frame leading to any measureable accomplishments. (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012, p. 143).



To better appreciate the full scope of the problem of unmanaged leadership succession it is useful to consider the number of schools, and by extension, the number of students potentially affected. According to ISC the number of English-medium international schools around the world as of September 2014 was 7399 (ISC, 2014). By February 2016, the number of schools has grown to 8231 units. Figure 1 provides a global breakdown by region.



*Figure 1: Number of schools by region (ISC, 2016).*

The most recent number as of May, 2017, lists 8712 entities operating globally as international schools (ISC, 2017). Their conservative projections indicate that by 2027 there will be over 16,600 international schools, teaching approximately 10.4 million students, with revenue exceeding \$82 billion USD (ISC, 2017). Figure 2 provides a visual reference of the number of actual and anticipated international

schools from 2000 to 2026. Figure 3 offers a visual reference of the actual and anticipated student population growth in international schools over the same time frame.

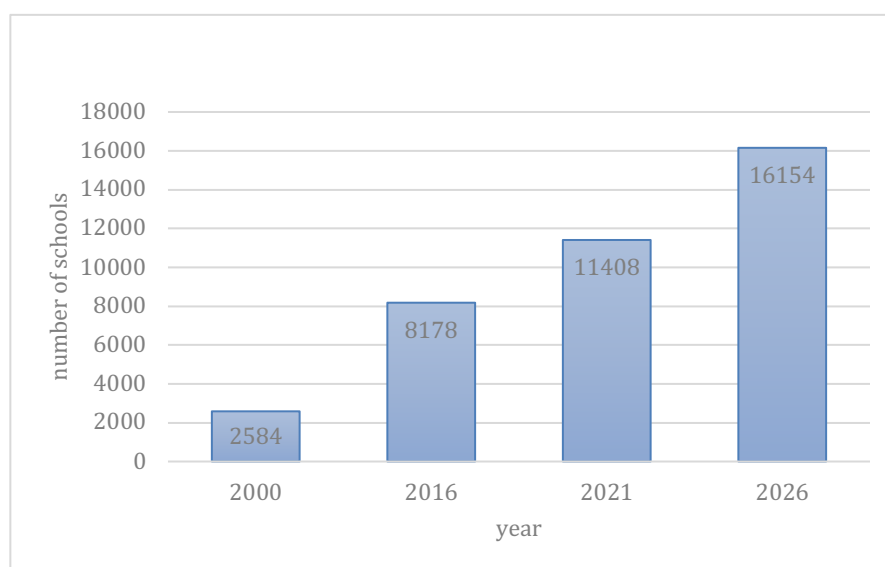


Figure 2. Global forecast of the number of international schools to 2026. (ISC, 2016)

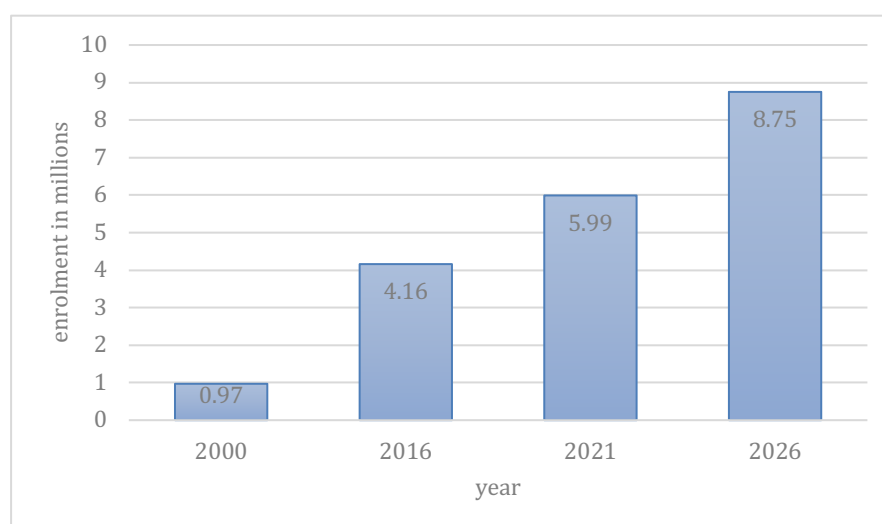


Figure 3. Forecast of student enrolment in millions to 2026. (ISC, 2016)

Regardless of the type or the location, the number of international schools across the world is significant and growing rapidly. In spite of these impressive figures, these numbers pale in comparison to the total number of schools in every

national jurisdiction across the world. Leadership succession is as much an issue in every national educational system as it is in international schools. With this in mind, the problem of unmanaged leadership succession evidently grows in orders of magnitude.

The main purpose of this study is to fill the evident gap in the literature concerning unplanned and unmanaged leadership succession in international schools. Given the rapid global growth in international schooling, the need for a clear understanding of the problem of leadership succession, and the unintended problems these episodic events bring has never been greater. This study has the potential to inform policy and practice in international schools as local governing bodies in these stand-alone schools struggle to maintain educational consistency and quality when their leadership turns over, on average, every 3.7 years (Benson, 2011). This study attempts to offer some insights into the problem, as well as offering evidence of successful practices undertaken at the study schools.

### **Key Terms**

Having already defined *succession planning and management* as a process of identifying critical management positions and developing the capacity of experienced and capable employees who are prepared to assume critical leadership roles as they become available (Rothwell, 2016, p. 6), it is important to further define a number of additional key terms in the interest of facilitating a shared understanding in this study. There is a confusing array of terms used to ascribe positional significance to the person holding the leadership title in international schools. Terms like Head of School, School Head, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Director, Executive Director, Education Director, and Principal are used to title top organizational positions (Keller, 2015). Due to the nature of international education, every school is left to its

own devices and imagination to provide titles for their educational leadership positions. Senior management, executive management, or management teams can be understood to be a group of high level executives who actively participate in the daily supervision, planning and administrative processes required by a school to help meet its operational objectives. The most senior position of an international school is often appointed by the school's board of directors. When it comes to the leadership positions in international schools, context is important. Major differences in context exist at various levels: organizational, local, community and larger cultural-environmental factors (Keller, 2015). These variations produce distinctly different job responsibilities for the individual occupying the position. For clarity and simplicity, and for the duration of this study, the senior executive educational leader is referred to as the *school director*, or more simply as *director*. The term *principal* is used as the title of the most senior leader of the primary, middle, or secondary schools within the international school organization.

Another term in need of clarification is *sustainable leadership*, a challenging term to accurately define given that the word sustainable connotes wide contextual meanings in both organizations and the environment. Michael Fullan (2005) offers a viable definition of sustainable leadership consistent with the usage in this study. He indicates sustainable leadership is “the capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with deep values of human purpose” (p. ix).

The concept of *succession* is also too general to be useful without some clarification. The word is included in terms like leadership succession, successor origins, and succession planning, which are related to organizational leadership, but succession is also connected to the ecology. For the purpose of this study, *Leadership*

*succession* is understood to be the sequencing process of replacing one leader with another (Gursky, 1961). A *successor* is an individual who assumes the position and responsibilities of the previous leader.

Successor origin makes a distinction between the appointment of a successor from *inside* the school and a successor from *outside* the school. Carlson (1961) was the first to classify inside vs. outside successors when he indicated insiders make fewer changes, are compensated less, and achieve less inter-organizational status. Outsiders are traditionally defined as individuals not employed by the school prior to their appointment. However, in spite of the relative clarity of this definition, the operational definition is not settled. Birnbaum (1971) challenged these distinctions during his study of university and college presidents. Birnbaum introduced the notion of industry familiarity, which meant that a successor could be new to the organization, but still be considered an insider relative to their knowledge and experience in the industry (as cited in Kresner and Sebor, 1994).

Hemlich and Brown (1972) further clarified the distinction of “outsiders” to denote individuals who were outside of the predecessors dominate “role constellation”. This particular definition implies that a successor could very well come from within the organization, but not from the executive circles in which the predecessor would circulate. For the purpose of this discussion, the working definition of outsider follows the Ferris, Jayaraman, and Lim (2015) definition, which indicates a new CEO, is considered to be an outsider if their tenure with the firm at the time of their appointment is less than one year.

The term *international school* is another key term in need of an unambiguous definition. However, as indicated earlier, the definition can be elusive depending on the context and the selected characteristics of the school used for definition (Bray,

2007; Hayden and Thompson, 2016; Keller, 2015). Given the challenge of defining an international school accurately, a definition is required that is both wide enough to capture the essence of international schooling, and sufficiently free of conditions and contextual ambiguities to be clearly identifiable. For the purpose of this study the term international school denotes a school that provides an English-medium curriculum other than the country's national curriculum and is international in its orientation (Bunnell et al., 2016; Hayden and Thompson, 2016; ISC, 2016).

The single word *stakeholder* is a term that belies its own complexity in the international school context. When the word stakeholder or stakeholders is used in the context of international schooling, it is rarely the case that the full complement of people, groups of people, or organizations is envisioned in the wide membership of international school stakeholders. For clarity, international school stakeholders include each of the following key actors within the school community: executive leadership, teachers, parents, pupils, public interacting with the school, school administration, enterprises supporting the school, non-profit organizations supporting the school, and civil society directly impacted by the school (Franzoni, Gennari, Gandini, & Salvioni, 2012).

Lastly, the term *governance* requires some attention if it is to be commonly understood in this study. Hodgson and Chuck (2015) suggest international school governance is not an easy concept to define with precision. Given the nebulous nature of international schools in general, it seems appropriate that defining international school governance would also be challenging. Nevertheless, organizational governance is by no means a new idea and so we are compelled to define this structure as accurately as possible. At its most basic level, there is a need for governance when a group of people come together to accomplish a task. When

the group becomes too large to efficiently manage critical decision-making, the group creates a body of individuals whose sole purpose is to make necessary decisions pertaining to the efficient operation of the organization. Long-term decisions on direction, goals, strategy, and value statements, which guide the activities of the organization, are made and managed by this governing body (Hodgson & Chuck, 2015, p. 20). In most organizations this decision-making group is called a board of directors; this is also the case in the international school context. However, since international schools are heavily influenced by their environments and are subject to the local laws of the land in which they conduct their activities, so it is with their governing bodies; who are also subject to the same local laws making their character and activities as unique as the school they govern.

For the purpose of this study, I will use the definition of *international school governance* provided by Adele Hodgson and Matthew Chuck in their book *Governance in International Schools*. Hodson and Chuck (2015) suggest governance is the way in which international schools are directed, controlled and led, and consists of four distinct elements: the relationships and the distribution of rights and responsibilities among those who work with and in the international school; the rules and procedures through which international school's objectives are set; the means of achieving those objectives and monitoring performance; and assigning accountability throughout the international schools (p. 10). As noted in the statement of study purpose, the *board chairperson*, as the chief representative of the governing body, will represent the governing body in this study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

A well-substantiated theory has within itself the power to explain and to meet the objectives of prediction and understanding of conditions and relationships among

and between independent and dependent variables of interest. More importantly, a solid theoretical framework offers a “vaccination” against myopic and overly simplistic interpretations of complex organizational processes. According to the Pappus of Alexandria, when Archimedes of Syracuse was demonstrating his lever, he was heard to say, “Give me a place to stand, and I shall move the earth” (Ceccarelli, 2014, p. 88). For this study, my “place to stand” is on the theoretical framework known as Event-System Theory (EST).

EST draws from the deep vault of Open System Theory, then extends Open System Theory by providing an explanation of when and how events affect both the behavior and features of organizational entities, ultimately leading to subsequent events (Morgeson, Mitchell, & Liu, 2015, p. 515). Katz and Kahn (1978) define Open System Theory as the process by which organizations import energy from their environment, transform it, then export the transformed product back into the environment. In the field of education, Bastedo (2006) suggests Open System Theory has profoundly changed how both schools as organizations, and the demands placed upon their educational leaders, are viewed in their wider environment (p. 712). Schools are situated within their unique socio-economic-political ecosystem; they are organizations that transform input energy and, at the same time, are influenced by the environment in which they are located.

The intersection of EST and Open System Theory opens the door for a more refined analysis of leadership succession by classifying succession as an event and contemplating the event strength by analyzing the disruptive characteristics of the event within the international school environment. It must be stated at this point that for the purpose of this study, the event of succession is understood to be an event in the most general sense. A leadership succession event can be broken up into pre,



during, and post succession phases for a more refined analysis. However, at this juncture there is no profit in dissecting the succession event as EST sufficiently reconciles the event by considering the characteristics and magnitude of the event in the most general sense.

EST is the lens through which all the findings of this study can be viewed. Each participant holds their own perception of the Event strength of leadership succession, and they will relate their perceptions of novelty, disruption and criticality as they offer their comments during the interviews. Once the findings have been gathered and analyzed, EST enables the reader to more fully appreciate the nature of leadership succession. More detail is presented on EST in Chapter Two.

### **Potential Study Approach**

This study is built on qualitative methods for data gathering. The researcher's choice to utilize one method over another is based on the nature of the study, the statement of study purpose, and the various characteristics of the available methods. Creswell (2014) and Maxwell (2013) clarify the main characteristics of a qualitative research design as: setting the study in the natural locale where participants experience the issue under study; the researcher as a key instrument for data collection; the opportunity for multiple sources of data from multiple perspectives; inductive and deductive data analysis by building themes, categories and patterns from the bottom up; hearing the voices of participants and focusing on the meaning participants hold about the issue under study; the emergent nature of data collection, which implies the shifting nature of data and the need for the researcher to respond to changing patterns of data collection; the need for the researcher to recognize the reflexive nature of their own role in the research, which demands a full disclosure of the researcher's positionality and value premise; finally, and very critically, the

opportunity for the holistic account, which is the opportunity for the researcher to expose the complexity of the issue under study by actually hearing the accounts of the participants (Creswell, 2014, p. 186; Maxwell, 2013, p. 30).

Qualitative studies by design are meant to be as holistic as possible, but limitations do exist, though these can be accounted for. The main disadvantage of qualitative research is that findings unique to the relatively few people participating in this research study make it difficult to generalize across entire groups in varied situations. Nevertheless, as the intent of this study is to understand the views of those individuals central to succession development decision-making, findings gathered in this study have significant value in their ability to point towards possible modes of action. There are several other issues which may be evident during the data gathering phase. These include, but are not limited to: issues of social desirability; the complexity of the study; the potential to miss some of the rich detail from participants because of questions that did not get asked, or questions that were not appropriately asked; the evident paucity of prior studies on this particular topic (this can be also seen as a strength of the study rather than a limitation); the statistical generalizability of the findings is dependent on N and the qualitative nature of the methods; the researcher's access to study subjects; and the final limitation which is the very fact that I am focusing my study on one geographic region which does not enable a direct connection to other regions in the world.

### **Organization of Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters, including the introduction chapter. Chapter Two offers a review of academic literature. There will be seven major sections in this chapter. These sections include a very brief summary of the emergence and maturation of succession research over the past six decades, the latest

research on the nature of international schools and international education, the unique characteristics of international school executive leadership and the inherent challenges facing these leaders, the leadership effect on student achievement, executive succession in educational contexts, factors related to international school governance, and the final section on Event System Theory. Chapter Three details the study methodology and methods, including research design and specific data collection and analysis procedures. I will also provide a clear explanation of my philosophical research orientation, my research positionality and value premise. Chapter Three will conclude with study limitations. Study findings are presented in Chapter Four. Finally, Chapter Five provides an analysis of findings, recommendations for practice, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion to this study.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

“As far as we are aware, there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership.” (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008, p. 29)

### **Introduction**

At the heart of this review of literature are three propositions: first, that the fundamental work of every school, international or national, is the decisive promotion of student achievement (DuFour & Marzano, 2015); second, the uninterrupted flow of talented, knowledgeable, and well prepared educational leadership can only happen by the purposeful forecasting of leadership needs based on the strategic goals of the school; and third, succession planning and management is the primary work of the governing body and the executive leader of the international school (Hodson & Chuck, 2015; Hooijberg & Lane, 2016). These propositions form the conceptual framework for this review of literature, which essentially represents an integrated method of viewing the problem of leadership succession in international schools (Imenda, 2014, p. 187).

The review of literature is divided into seven major topical sections. The first section is a brief historical précis of the executive succession research stream since its origins in 1960. The intent of this section is to offer the reader a qualitative appreciation for the general field of research into leadership succession and its maturation over time.

The second section is a look at the current research on succession planning and management. Rothwell (2016) offers a comprehensive analysis of the organization and its need for strategic succession planning and management. Succession planning and management addresses three fundamental elements of

organizational succession planning: what roles are critical to the organization's strategic achievement; which employee(s) are necessary to meet the requirements of these roles; and, how can the transition be managed so as to reduces uncertainty.

The third section is an examination of current research on the identity and nature of international schools. International schools have been isolated fixtures on the global landscape since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Hayden and Thompson, 2013). Today, international education is a multibillion-dollar global commodity (Altbach, 2015) fueling unprecedented growth in the international school market (ISC, 2016). In spite of the extraordinary growth of international education, there are persistent ethical concerns about the nature of international schooling and the interplay between local educational structures and semi-autonomous international schools (Wilkins, 2015).

The fourth section examines the nature of leadership in international schools and the effect of that leadership on student achievement. It is important to note this study is not a contemplation on educational leadership nor its many manifestations. This study is centered on the recurring themes influencing leadership succession in international schools. However, because senior leaders are central to leadership succession, it is critical to make the necessary space for school leadership and the nature of the role, the problem of too-frequent turnover, and the very unique challenges these school leaders face in their respective contexts.

There is a substantial body of educational research explaining how leaders influence student achievement (DuFour & Marzano, 2015). At the same time, there is also an accruing body of educational research that suggests unanticipated and unplanned turnover in any school has a disruptive effect on the “development and

maintenance of social resources” (Hanselman, Grigg, Bruch, & Gamoran, 2011 as cited in Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013, p. 27).

The fifth section offers an overview of research pertaining to international school governing bodies that are charged with strategic advancement of the organization. This section also considers the membership within these governing bodies, the role and responsibilities of the governing body of an international school, and the challenges facing international school governance as it relates to leadership succession planning and management.

The sixth section in this review of literature offers a deeper look at the specifics of succession in educational contexts. The vein of research devoted to leadership succession in educational contexts emerges with Carlson’s (1961) study on superintendent succession. However, in spite of this promising start, it is Hargreaves and Goodson’s (2006) study covering three decades of succession that offers a significant and useful body of research into world leadership succession in educational contexts.

Finally, the seventh major section provides a discussion of the theoretical framework on which this study rests. Event-System Theory (EST) offers an excellent lens by which to view leadership succession. Planned or unplanned, succession is the event that creates an event system. EST defines an event system as a complex of three interacting components: the strength of the event, the event space (the hierarchical level at which the event happens), and the event time (Morgeson, Mitchell, & Liu 2015, p. 517).

### **Six Decades of Succession Research**

What appears today to be a rich vein of succession literature has not always been the case. Brady and Helmich (1984) observe, “the dearth of systematic studies

devoted to the subject [of leadership succession] is puzzling” (p. 2). A decade later, regarding the increasing interest in top management succession, Kresner and Seborá (1994) state, “the increased attention has created a diffused and often chaotic research stream. Consequently, when it comes to executive succession, there is little that we know conclusively, much we do not know because of mixed results, and even more that we have not yet studied” (p. 327). It is well beyond the scope of this study to provide a complete historical account of the academic research on executive succession. However, it is beneficial to have an appreciation for the early work of researchers in the field of executive succession since it is their excellent work, which endows this study with the opportunity to contribute to the corpus of research.

Systematic research on leadership succession began in the early 1960s under the careful analysis of Oscar Grusky, professor emeritus at UCLA in the department of Sociology. Prior to Grusky’s work, most of what was understood about leadership succession was based on scattered individual case studies. Grusky was among the first to identify key relatable variables in succession and establish a model for research. He is largely credited with moving the field forward (Kresner & Seborá, 1994; Giambatista, Rowe, & Riaz, 2005). Grusky’s 1960 study in administrative succession established the importance of this field when he stated succession is important to understand for two fundamental reasons: succession is a universal constant for all organizations, and administrative succession inevitably leads to organizational instability (p. 105).

The 1970s was a decade devoted to building theory and gaining empirical evidence in succession research (Kresner & Seborá, 1994). The research began to evolve into key streams of interest in areas like antecedents of succession, patterns of succession, successor characteristic, and board involvement in succession

(Giambatista, Rowe, & Riaz, 2005). Successor origin was of particular interest to researchers who were interested in understanding how “insider” and “outsider” status related to the succession event of the organization. Donald Helmich and Jeffery Pfeffer led the way in this area with much of the research into successor origin (Kresner & Sebor, 1994).

The 1980s and 1990s brought further improvement and refinement for both theory and research methodology (Giambatista, Rowe, & Riaz, 2005). Of notable interest was the confirmation of findings relating increased rates of succession to poor organizational performance (Giambatista, Rowe, & Riaz, 2005). This finding is remarkable and highly connected to this study because the implication of “poor organizational performance” in the international school context directly translates to lower student achievement. Benson (2011) conducted a study of executive leader turnover in 165 international schools; he determined the average tenure for chief administrators in international schools is 3.7 years. When Benson’s findings are coupled with the troubling association between increased rates of succession and lower organizational performance there is much cause for concern.

Given the concerning implications of leadership succession, the field has continued to remain a fruitful avenue for scholars. However, it has been characterized as “fragmented and variable” (Giambatista, Rowe & Riaz, 2005, p. 981), which is a faint echo of Kresner and Sebor’s critique. Nevertheless, in spite of the *fragmented* and *variable* nature, there is evident progress in the field of executive succession, particularly in the contextual understanding of processes leading to succession events (Giambatista et al., 2005). William J. Rothwell, (2016) provides much needed currency with his work in the field of succession planning and management.



## **Succession Planning and Management**

According to Rothwell (2016), succession planning and management is the process of stabilizing the tenure of key personnel to ensure the continued effective performance of the organization by providing for the development, replacement, and strategic application of key people (p. 6). Rothwell (2016) suggests an increasing awareness that succession is not a simple balancing of the leadership equation. If succession were an uncomplicated exchange of one body for another, then anybody with a reasonable resume would do. However, the problem of leadership succession is much more systemic than meets the eye. Rothwell (2016) indicates that when experienced leaders leave, the tangible loss of capacity to do the work is the least of the problem. The very real cost to the organization of unmanaged succession is the unanticipated loss of accumulated wisdom and institutional memory, which leaves with the departing leader. It is also evident that issues of succession are not restricted to the top of the organizational chart. Succession involves careful and thoughtful planning for replacing key staff at all levels of the organization (p. xviii). While the executive level of the organization provides strategic leadership, key individuals at all levels of the organization are responsible for cultivating enduring social relationships with key stakeholders in the organizational community (Rothwell, 2016). The absence of a coherent succession plan signals to the community a lack of strategic planning and vision.

## **International Schools**

The context for this study is the international school marketplace. International schools have become increasingly difficult to accurately define, due to a number of key reasons: the impressive growth of these schools; lack of a common agreement over what qualifies as an international school; the unregulated nature of

these schools; the fact that many of these schools do not use the term international in their title (Hayden & Thompson, 2008); the question of whether an ad hoc collection of international schools constitutes a system, or an industry, for which no adjudicating body seems to exist (Hayden and Thompson, 2013; MacDonald, 2009); the rising diversity among school types, settings, and clientele; and the use of the value-laden, and increasingly contested term, *international* in the title of many of these schools (Bunnell et al., 2016). By way of this review of literature, it is my hope that the context for this study is brought into sharper focus, and as a result the reader understands and appreciates the increasingly complex and confused space school leadership occupies.

In this review, three prominent sections provide a viable way to understand the 21<sup>st</sup> century manifestation of international schooling: first, the globalization and commodification of education, second, a comprehensive typology of international schooling, with an emphasis on the rise of Type C international schools, which are challenging the philosophical foundation on which modern, national P-12 schooling is built, and finally, a feasible definition of international schooling.

Globalization and the commodification of education have given rise to unparalleled growth in both the number of schools currently operating and, by extension, the number of students attending these institutions (Hallgarten et al., 2015; Waterson, 2016). Events in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century gave birth to the modern international school and ushered in a prosperous and relatively stable tenure for these schools. However, changes in the global economy, beginning in the 1980s, started to alter expectations for general education in both national and international schooling. Increasing globalization enabled a greater acceptance of neoliberalism, which is the resurgence of 19th century ideas associated with laissez-faire economic liberalism.

The manifestation of these principles resulted in extensive economic liberalization policies, including: privatization, competition, fiscal austerity, choice, deregulation, free trade, consumerism, commercialization, and reductions in government spending in order to enhance the role of the private sector in the economy (Waterson, 2016, p. 186). The resulting flow of people, capital, finance, ideas and technology have a direct and significant impact on education in two fundamental ways: national educational policy makers are recognizing the shifting global landscape and are attempting to ‘internationalize’ the educational experience for the young learners within their systems; and second, the increasing number of new educational formats are growing in quantity and influence as the new aspiring consumer elite recognize the opportunity in global citizenship (Allan, & Charles, 2015; Hayden, 2011, p. 212).

The Second of the three salient elements is a discussion of the typology of international schools. EcoLint was the very first iteration of the modern international school; it was also the very first iteration of the Type A international school. Since then, the typology has grown to three: Type A, B and C. This section will offer a practical understanding of the three types of schools. Given the increasing complexity of the international school context, it is helpful to remember that not all schools are created equal, and as a result, the event of leadership succession may transpire differently given the type of school in which the succession event is taking place.

The differing and diverging nature of these three types of international schools is a result of how quickly the market place is growing. As of January 2016, international schools generated approximately 38.9 billion USD from 4.16 million students. They are projected to generate 89.9 billion USD by 2026 from an estimated

8.75 million students (ISC, 2016). By any objective measure, these statistics constitute a valuable and significant marketplace. It is important to understand that these statistics are not a result of the efforts of a handful of multinational corporations; they are the aggregate of an ad hoc collection of international schools. Currently, only 11% of international schools are part of a grouping of two or more schools (Waterson, 2016, p. 202). Correspondingly, 89% of schools are independent stand-alone units, implying a very loose configuration rather than a tight system. Nevertheless, regardless of location, affiliation, or typology, international schools have the ability to generate massive revenue from school fees.

In the interest of simplicity and brevity, international schools fall into three basic types:

Type A: These schools were established largely to cater to expatriate families, for whom the local education system is not appropriate. English is the primary spoken and written medium of instruction and communication (Brummitt, & Keeling, 2013; Hallgarten, Tabberer & McCarthy, 2015; Hill, 2014). The earliest example of such a school dates back to 1890, when the Anglican Diocese of Bloemfontein helped to establish the European School of Maseru, in what is now modern Lesotho. This school educated the children of British administrative officials, missionaries as well as traders. Today, that same school is known as Maseru English Medium Preparatory School (Hayden and Thompson, 2013). In 1924, the International School of Geneva (EcoLint) opened its doors as an educational response to the unprecedented tragedy of the First World War, and as a practical response to the educational requirements of children of League of Nation employees. EcoLint represents the first iteration of the modern Type A international school (Hallgarten et al., 2015).

Type B: These schools were established on an ideological framework with the mission of bringing young people from different parts of the world together for the purpose of promoting mutual understanding and global peace, vis-à-vis Nobel Laureate Lester B. Pearson, and based on the educational philosophy of Kurt Hahn (Hayden and Thompson, 2013; Van Oord, 2010). These types of schools are comparatively few in number. The flagship of such schools is the United World Colleges, established in 1962 with the opening of UWC Atlantic College in South Wales (Hayden and Thompson, 2013). Today, the group has 16 schools serving more than 60,000 students from 180 countries (UWC, 2016). These schools attempt to promote “international mindedness” by embedding an international perspective in their curriculum (Hill, 2014).

Type C: These schools represent the most recent configuration of international schools, and perhaps the most confounding. Fundamentally, Type C schools cannot be categorized as either Type A or B schools but appear to fit the definition of international school as established earlier. A distinctive feature of these schools is that they cater to fee-paying host country nationals, whose SES offers them the opportunity to access an education perceived to be of higher quality than that available in the national education system (Hayden and Thompson, 2013). The Type C schools are typically privately owned and are operated on a for-profit basis (Brummit & Keeling, 2013; Haywood, 2015; MacDonald, 2009). Type C international schools are responsible for most of the modern global growth in international education. It is now estimated that two thirds of all international schools are for-profit schools operating under this typology (The Economist, 2014; ISC, 2016; Waterson, 2016).

Despite the convenient international school typology presented here, the variation between and within typologies is becoming increasingly diverse, adding to the complexity of the international school space (Fertig & James, 2016). The research on international schools continues to be very active.

Finally, the third element of this review of literature is a workable definition of international education. International schools seem to straddle the space between the purely national and exclusively global, which suggests a problem in identifying their exact relationship to either the national or global spaces in which it operates (Bray, 2007). In spite of this challenge, Hayden and Thompson (2013) have provided a workable definition of international schools by considering the one common characteristic found in all schools that describe themselves as international: the education is based on a curriculum that is not from the host country (the country in which the school is located).

Naturally, the Hayden and Thompson definition is only one of many. For the purpose of cross-referencing, it is helpful to consider a second definition of international schools. International School Consultancy (ISC), a private research firm and source of market intelligence on the world of international English-speaking schools, offers a second definition for international schools. Their database criteria for inclusion of a school is:

“the school delivers a curriculum to any combination of pre-school, primary or secondary students, wholly or partly in the English language outside an English-speaking country” or, “the school is in a country where English is one of the official languages, offers an English-medium curriculum other than the country’s national curriculum and is international in its orientation” (ISC, 2016).

The ISC definition appears to be wider than the Hayden and Thompson definition, and better able to handle the growing ambiguity in the increasingly confused space. Bunnell, Fertig, and James (2016) add a final provision to the definition of international school in that “an international curriculum must be the central task of an international school if it is to legitimately claim to be international (p. 6).

Despite the apparent simplicity of these two definitions, including the Bunnell et al. (2016) proviso, the matter of defining an international school is far from settled. Ian Hill (2016) muddies the water by proposing that not all international schools offer an international education, and that both national and private national schools can and do offer international education (p. 9). To get a better grip on the definition, Hill (2016) suggests that in order to have a stronger understanding of international schools it would be helpful to think of schools along a continuum, from the purely national on the left to purely international on the right. It is accepted that the ideal forms on the extrema of this continuum do not really exist in practice (p. 11). As stated earlier in Key Terms, for the purpose of this study the term international school denotes a school that provides an English-medium curriculum, other than the country’s national curriculum, and is international in its orientation (Bunnell et al., 2016; Hayden and Thompson, 2016; ISC, 2016).

In spite of the convenient international school typology presented here, the variation between and within typologies is becoming increasingly diverse, which adds to the complexity of the international school space (Fertig & James, 2016). However, the research on international schools continues to be very active. Questions about the “international mindedness” of students in international schools (Harwood & Bailey, 2012; Castro, Lundgren, & Woodin, 2015; Hill, 2014) are being considered more

fully, as is the legitimacy of a school's claim to be an international school as understood through the lens of institutional theory (Bunnell, Fertig, & James, 2016; Fertig & James, 2016). It is well beyond the scope of this study to consider these aspects of international schools, however given the difficulty in pinning down a precise definition of these entities, and the fluidity of the international school space, further study in this area is welcomed.

### **Executive Leadership in International Schools**

Dufour and Marzano (2015) state the challenge for all school leadership perfectly, "In short, the justifiable conclusion one can glean from the research, is that the more skilled the building [leader], the more learning can be expected among students" (p. 48). School leadership has always been a challenge; leadership in international schools even more so (Fertig & James, 2016). For the international school leader, the challenge of leadership doubles as they are tasked to lead very complex schools and, at the same time, they must seek to legitimize their school organizations as international schools (Bunnell, et al., 2016). Given the evident challenge in defining international schools, and the further challenge of leading in the international school space, establishing the essential leadership characteristics of an international school leader with any certainty is a formidable task, A task left to the governing body of each international school to fulfil, and is one of their most important responsibilities (Hodgson & Chuck, 2015; Roberts & Mancuso, 2014). Among the many important roles the governing body has, such as strategic planning, budget development and approval, and policy formulation and adoption, the governing body is responsible for selecting, supporting, nurturing, and evaluating the head of school (Hodgson & Chuck, 2015). The search begins with a description of



the ideal candidate, defining all the necessary qualities, characteristics, training, and skills necessary to effectively lead the school (Roberts & Mancuso, 2014).

Ultimately, their choice of leader cannot be taken lightly as there is a substantial body of current evidence suggesting the leader's role in school effectiveness is pivotal in improving student achievement (Valentine & Prater, 2011; Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2014; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Dufour & Marzano, 2015). However, in spite of a significant body of research indicating the strong link between the quality of senior leadership and student achievement, there is the ever-present problem of too-frequent executive turnover. Unmanaged turnover is considered to have a disruptive organizational effect and it introduces vulnerability into the school community (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Ultimately, unanticipated, unmanaged or too-frequent executive turnover will negatively impact students' achievement (Ronfeldt et al 2013).

#### **Frequency of Executive Turnover.**

John Benson was introduced earlier in this chapter for his findings regarding the problem of too-frequent administrative turnover and the average tenure of international school administrative executives. Benson (2011) spotlights two themes relating to administrative turnover - the average tenure of international school heads and the reasons they left their posts. Previous to Benson's study, David Hawley (1995) and John Littleford (1999) completed the only meaningful work on the subject. Their work was primarily focused on administrative turnover in US state department schools in the case of Hawley, and US independent schools in the case of Littleford (Benson, 2011, p. 87). Because of the US focus of these authors, Benson's work is necessary to fill in the gaps regarding non-affiliated international schools.

The findings of his study fall under two broad categories: average tenure, and reasons, as described by the heads of school, for their departure. Benson's study is based on the responses to a questionnaire by 165 administrators. Results indicated the average tenure for chief administrators is 3.7 years, which is an increase from Hawley's (1994) findings of 2.8 years. He also discovered that tenure seemed to be region specific, with the Americas and Europe having the longest tenures at 4.0 years and 3.9 years respectively. The shortest tenure was Africa at 3.5 years, but in this case this number represents a significant increase over Hawley's findings of 1.9 years (Benson, 2011, p. 89). Factors that influenced tenure are: the language of the host country - same or different from the administrator, marital status, and the factor of school-aged children (Benson, 2011, p. 100). As one might expect, Benson's study indicates that the longest tenure is attributed to those administrators whose home language is the same as the host country, who are in a long-term marriage or partnership, and who have two or more children living with them.

The second component of Benson's study looks at reasons why administrators leave their post. The top three factors influencing an administrator's decision to leave their positions are school boards, career, and family (Benson, 2011, p. 97). The influence of the board is the most salient factor with reasons ranging from micromanagement by the board in the daily running of the school, too frequent change of board members, unhealthy board member relations, untrained boards, and board members with agendas unrelated to the sound management of the school. Benson's findings speak directly to the quality and experience of international school boards if retention of the school head is the goal of the international school.

### **International School Executive Leadership Characteristics.**

Perhaps Benson's most significant finding is that there is a personal profile for a

head of school that may defy the average tenure statistics. Benson suggested three key personal factors in order to maximize headship tenure: first, school boards should consider married or partnered heads of school with at least one school-aged child; second, previous international school experience is a must, along with senior administration experience in their home country; and third, the leader must hold some related international qualification from an organization specializing in international school leadership (Benson, 2011, p. 100). Leithwood et al., (2008) establish seven strong claims about successful school leadership. The claims are not site-specific; they apply to all schools, in all jurisdictions, including international schools. The seven claims are:

- School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.
- Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices.
- The ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices, not the practices themselves, demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work.
- School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions.
- School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed.
- Some patterns of distribution are more effective than others.
- A small handful of personal traits (ex. disposition, resiliency, perception of self-efficacy, persistence, optimism, and high expectations of excellence)

explains a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness (p. 27)

The foundational theme in these seven claims is the need for effective, purposeful leadership. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine each of these claims in their entirety, however, these statements set an operational backdrop for this study. It is strongly recommended that future researchers consider how these seven strong claims about school leadership are operationalized in the unique context of international schools. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to determine recurring themes influencing the process of leadership succession in international schools. It is evident that talented educational leadership is the *sine qua non* ingredient if a school is going to realize the full potential of its students. Therefore, it follows that the unplanned interruption of sound educational leadership in general, talented leadership in particular, will have a disruptive and destabilizing effect on the school community in general, student achievement in particular. According to Leithwood et al (2008), unplanned, or poorly managed senior leader succession is one of the most common sources of friction resulting in a schools' failure to advance student achievement (p. 29).

In a more recent study, Roberts and Mancuso (2014) investigated the leadership qualities that school boards of international schools around the world have been searching for. Data from 84 job advertisements from 64 countries on six continents was gathered spanning 2006 to 2012. Roberts and Mancuso (2014) hypothesized that school boards were likely to write directly into their job advertisements the various qualities they most desired in the educational leaders they were seeking (p. 92).

Roberts and Mancuso (2014) asked two fundamental questions: are international schools across the world looking for the same leader types, and have the

desired types and characteristics of leadership demonstrated any evolution over time?

To answer the first question leadership styles were compared against continental location. *Table 1* (Roberts & Mancuso, 2014, p. 98) reveals percentage of schools in each continental area seeking various leadership styles. It is interesting to note that all continental areas place a consistently low value on child-centered leadership but is found to be particularly low in South America and Australasia. In nearly all cases, and not surprisingly given the mandate of the school board, managerial leadership styles seem to be favored.

*Table 1*

Percentage of schools on each continent seeking leaders of various styles.

<u>Continent</u>	<u>Managerial</u>	<u>Instructional</u>	<u>Collaborative</u>	<u>Child-Centered</u>
Africa	83	72	78	33
Asia	100	90	83	30
Australasia	100	100	100	0
Europe	100	90	100	20
North America	100	56	67	33
South America	94	94	75	13
Total	95	83	81	26

In answer to the second question regarding the evolution of style preference over time, the data was organized by time blocks. *Table 2* (Roberts & Mancuso, 2014, p. 101) summarizes the data of time frame by style. In summary, the analysis displayed that most school boards are seeking Managerial, Instructional, and Collaborative/Distributive leaders. Interestingly, there is a surprising and substantial increase in the percentage of schools searching for collaborative leaders beginning in 2008. With the exception of collaborative leadership, it appears the demand for managerial and instructional styles has persisted from 2006 to 2012.

*Table 2*

Percentage of schools in search of various leader types by time period.

<u>Time Period</u>	<u>Managerial</u>	<u>Instructional</u>	<u>Collaborative</u>	<u>Child-Centered</u>
2006-2008	97	76	2	18
2008-2010	100	93	80	20
2010-2012	92	86	81	36

A point of clarity is required when considering the terminology of the four leadership types. The information gathered for this study was gathered from 84 unique job advertisements from international schools searching for leadership candidates. These advertisements are qualitative in nature, and therefore were subjected to a summative content analysis to code the data. From the codes, the investigators then generated a list of 27 relevant themes. In the process of coding, two broad categories emerged: leader types, and personal qualities. The four leadership types identified by the researchers, managerial, instructional, collaborative/distributive, and child-centered, were identified from the 84 advertisements (Roberts & Mancuso, 2014, p. 94). It is unclear from the research if the four leadership types were an interpretation of the data by the coders, or if these types are specifically called for by name in the advertisements. Nevertheless, given the common nature of these terms, and their frequent usage in educational research, it is sufficient to accept the meaning of these terms at their face value. A recommendation for the study authors would be to clearly define these terms.

In spite of the evident imperative for school governance to seek senior leadership with a strong managerial skill set, there is growing clarity among educational leaders and researchers that increasing capacity in structures which build and nurture conditions for learning are far more important than increasing the capacity of managerial efficiency, and student accountability (English, 2012). It is apparent

from the data in both *Table 1* and *Table 2* that instructional leadership is highly sought after, but it is clearly second to managerial leadership in nearly every jurisdiction, and the demand appears to be consistent over time.

Effective learning environments do not build themselves in the absence of a strong instructional leader; at the same time, the efficient day-to-day operations of the school does not spontaneously happen in the absence of strong management (Valentine & Prater, 2011, p. 22). The ability to walk the thin line separating inspiring instructional leader and effective manager is a leadership quality that may well be the most difficult job description of any educational leader.

### **The Influence of Leadership on Student Achievement.**

The epigraph at the beginning of this chapter singularly captures the fundamental reason why there is a clear need for effective succession planning and management. However, only half the quote was presented. The other half offers a reason why there has been no documented case of a school successfully changing its achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership. Leithwood et al., (2008) further state: “leadership serves as a catalyst for unleashing the potential capacities that already exist in the organization” (p. 29). It is understood that unplanned or unmanaged succession events have a disruptive organizational influence (Grusky, 1961), interrupting the formation and maintenance of staff cohesion and community. It also has the damaging effect of inducing feelings of vulnerability and confusion among teachers and students (Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff, 2013).

From the executive leader advertisement data collected by Roberts and Mancuso (2014), international school boards articulated 22 ideal personal qualities desired in their next leader. Each of the 22 qualities were coded and categorized into one of four scales borrowed from the work of Bass and Avolio (1994) on

Transformational Leadership (TL). These scales are: Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, Individual Stimulation, and Idealized Influence (Bass, & Avolio, 1994, p. 45; Bass, Riggio, 2010; Marks & Printy, 2003; Roberts & Mancuso, 2014, p. 95). The four TL scales are consistent with research conducted in the field of TL and have persisted over time since Bass and Avolio published their work in 1994.

Hitt and Tucker (2016) provide five essential domains of effective leadership practices leading to increased student achievement in their meta-analysis of 56 peer-reviewed research studies between 2000 and 2014. Their findings indicate that the leadership practices found to correlate positively with increased student attainment are the characteristics of Instructional Leadership (IL). These are: establishing and conveying the vision (Inspirational); facilitating a high-quality learning experience for students; building professional capacity among teachers (Intellectual); creating a supportive organization for learning (Individual); and connecting with external partners (Influence) (p. 542). These IL practices are closely in line with the TL qualities of the Four Is from Bass and Avolio (1994).

The Roberts and Mancuso (2014) findings suggest that international school boards are effectively searching for a managerial leader with transformational leader tendencies. The Hitt and Tucker (2016) findings suggest a nearly perfect fit between TL and IL characteristics. However, Hattie (2015) draws a line between the two, stating TL is primarily focused on teachers and the promotion of their capacity to do the work, and IL is focused on students and the impact that teachers have on student learning (Hattie, 2015, p. 37; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). To add quantifiable weight to his statement, Hattie demonstrates that TL has an effect size of 0.11 on student learning, compared to IL with an effect size of 0.42 on student learning. Therefore, the lesson for governing bodies of international schools is clear: if they



want to have the biggest impact on student achievement, they should be primarily searching for an instructional leader who is also comfortable in a managerial role.

There is always something compelling about quantifiable data; perhaps it is the impartiality of numbers that suggests the futility in arguing against their indications. Embedded in the apparent objectivity of the leadership effect size is the unspoken demand that bigger is necessarily better. When TL (0.11) is compared against IL (0.42) the implication is that IL is the best approach. Furthermore, what educational leader, international or otherwise, would willingly choose to pattern their leadership style on a less efficacious approach, vis-à-vis effect size? In fact, this question is a non-starter and in reality, educational leaders are neither 100% one style nor the other. Marks and Printy (2003) provide a model of integrated leadership which offers a balance between the two styles. Marks and Printy (2003) indicate that the transformational leader seeks to elicit the highest level of commitment from all school personnel and to develop organizational capacity for school improvement. Correspondingly, the instructional leader collaborates with teachers to accomplish organizational goals for teaching and learning (p. 377). Whereas Hattie (2015) may suggest that these leadership dimensions are analytically distinct, in reality they correspond in practice into an integrated leadership style (Hitt, & Tucker, 2016).

Roberts & Mancuso (2014) reveal that leadership searches focus on leaders who can run the school efficiently and competently, but who are also capable of leading with a humane and caring style that puts student achievement at the top of their agenda. If all that matters in international education are strong accounting skills, excellent detail management, and a long memory for political score keeping, then anyone with sound managerial experience will suffice (Fink, 2010). This leadership duality presents a challenge for the international school leader called upon to

efficiently lead (manager) the organization and encourage increased student achievement (integrated leader) in the face of standardized assessments and mounting pressure for accountability.

### **Unique Challenges of Executive Leadership in International Schools.**

If the governing boards of international schools face a critical challenge in recruiting the right senior leadership, then those senior leaders are confronted with a double challenge when they accept the role. Brummit (2007) indicates leaders of international schools immediately find themselves leading a very loosely defined and rapidly growing niche educational enterprise (as cited in Keller, 2015). Furthermore, Haywood (2002) suggests senior leadership in international schools have certain critical dimensions which distinguish it from other leadership roles within the school. When comparing the roles of international school heads to those of their national school counterparts, there is an even more pronounced differentiation as Haywood underscores the unique international nature of nearly every decision (as cited in Keller, 2015). For example, teacher recruitment would fall into the task portfolio of both international school leaders and national school leaders. However, the recruitment for an international school has a number of very challenging human constraints attached, which make the undertaking very problematic, not the least of which is the complex problem of bridging cultures within the international school community (Keller, 2015).

As a corollary to the complex issue of bridging culture, international school recruitment is a particularly potent area where the need to balance the competing essentials of locally-hired staff against staff hired from other countries can be the undoing of a senior leader. Caffyn (2011) captures the unique situation internationally-hired staff can find themselves in when he states, “International

schools and their communities can become isolated from their immediate locality and from their homelands... [This] kind of environment produces a psychic prison, which increases distance, frustration, and emotional tension” (p. 74). With respect to the interaction between the locally hired and the internationally hired staff, Caffyn (2011) continues, “There are different levels of interaction, diverse groups and subcultures, made up of permanence and transience. [We should recognize] the power-distance and politics caused by these emotional plays between permanent and transient groups in an international expatriate community” (p. 74). Ultimately, it falls on the senior leader to recognize the potency of this problem, and to thoughtfully make decisions to mitigate the potential paralyzing effects on staff morale and staff efficaciousness. Eventually, if left unattended, this single problem can and will lead to complications with student achievement.

The problem of staffing is only one of a host of potentially destabilizing leadership challenges facing international school leaders; the list is long. Keller (2015) use the notion of dualities to capture the challenges of leadership in international schools due to their very nature. He identifies various sets and further differentiates these dualities into either spatial or temporal. Examples of spatial dualities may include: local citizens versus expatriates, on-campus residents versus off campus staff, and upper campus versus lower campus (p. 904). Examples of temporal dualities may include: the school’s history versus needed changes, senior staff versus rookies (young vs. old), the needs of graduating seniors versus the needs of the new kindergarten students, and traditional education versus the perception of innovation in the classroom (p. 905).

### **Political Challenge of Executive Leadership in International Schools.**

“Leadership succession is inherently political” (Fink, 2010, p. 118). Of all

the challenges awaiting senior leaders in an international school, the most potentially damaging challenge they will face is that of politics. Politics are at the core of every organization and it is how various stakeholder groups gain access to scarce resources and influence (Bolman and Deal, 2013; Fineman, 2009; Zald, 1965). International schools are first and foremost organizations, and as such they are as susceptible to micro-political intrigue as any fortune 500 companies. Caffyn (2011) defines micro-politics as the way in which power is transmitted in everyday practices; it is embedded in the minutiae of social relations. It defines how power is relayed through transactions that evolve in a typical organizational day. Micro-politics is the subtext of organizational life in which conflicts, tensions, resentments, competing interests, and power imbalances influence everyday transactions in institutions (p. 324). In an international school, the nature of micro-politics, and the actors who influence and motivate it, is best articulated by Caffyn (2011) when he states “Those who control international schools and their teachers are not state systems but powerful clientele, transnational elites and those with locational power and knowledge. Here, power is more openly contested and those with positional power can gain greater control” (p. 325).

If Grusky set the stage for academic research into leadership succession, then it was Mayer Zald (1965) who first recognized the political nature of leadership succession in organizations. Naturally, the study of succession is a central topic in political science circles because of the significant impact of succession at the nation level. Both the process and outcome of selection are critical indices of the underlying political strata and are useful and generally accurate in revealing the direction in which the prevailing political winds are blowing.

Zald (1965) characterizes the organization as resembling a monarchy or a

dictatorship. He states, “whoever ‘owns’ the organization (that is, has legal control and responsibility for the organization) has the right to appoint and remove individuals from positions in the organization” (p. 52). In the case of international schools, the “ownership” is entirely dependent on the typology of the school. With the unprecedented growth in Type C schools, the question of ownership and control is clearly settled. Legal control and responsibility for the school rests in the hands of the owner and/or the shareholders of the school. Zald (1965) recognizes the unique nature of each organization and makes concessions for various unique departures from his model of monarchy or dictatorship. In the case of international schools, this departure would include “the set of understandings and traditions marking out the prerogative of various groups and in effect setting limits to rule” (p. 53). Since international schools behave as schools in the most traditional sense, the “understandings and traditions” Zald refers to are operationalized in the hierarchical forms of governance in schools, beginning with the head of school, then the section principals, specialist and content heads of department and the various supervisory roles in every international school. The daily operational decisions in a school resemble a democratic form of governance. However, in the case of leadership succession, the decision of who shall lead is in the hands of very few individuals. The act of choosing a successor is very closely reflected in the power balance of the organization. It is not generally the case that minority interests have a viable say in the selection of the next school leader (Zald, 1965, p. 53).

### **International School Governance**

There is a general understanding that the way in which a school is governed has direct implications on the fundamental work of the school and the school’s legitimacy as an institution (Hodson & Chuck 2015; James & Sheppard, 2014).

However, what is it about this body of individuals that gives them their rightful position to govern the school? Is it their expertise in educational leadership? Is it their expertise in corporate leadership and management? In either case, the answer is generally no. The model for international school governing bodies is a generally parent-dominated group. In spite of persistent and frequent turnover, this organizational structure continues to be the model for most international school boards (Hodson & Chuck 2015, p. 21). John Carver, noted author, researcher, and specialist on governance, describes these boards as “incompetent groups of competent people” (as cited in Hodson & Chuck 2015, p. 21). Carver (2013) suggests there is a very peculiar dilemma facing the governing body of any international school given the general makeup of its members. He asks:

“How can a group of peers be a responsible owner-representative, exercising authority over activities they will never completely see, toward goals they cannot fully measure, through jobs and disciplines they will never master themselves? How can they fulfill their own accountability while not, at the same time, infringing unnecessarily on the creativity and prerogatives of management? How can they do so when within themselves they disagree, there is a limited time for the task, and there is an unending stream of organizational details demanding inspection?” (retrieved from <http://www.policygovernanceconsulting.com/the-carver-policy-governance-model/resources/articles-and-tools/38-policy-governance-in-a-nutshell-by-john-carver>)

Few members of governing boards realize the true challenge in their role: which is the need to negotiate the fine balance between legal responsibility for the

school and, at the same time, not being able to participate in the hands-on management of daily operations (Hodson & Chuck 2015).

Hodson and Chuck (2015) suggest governance is the way in which international schools are directed, controlled and led, and consist of four distinct elements: the relationships and the distribution of rights and responsibilities among those who work with and in the international school; the rules and procedures through which international school's objectives are set; the means of achieving those objectives and monitoring performance; and assigning accountability throughout the international schools (p. 10). Powell et al., (2003) offer the most distilled list of activities related to the governing board when he states "the work of the board is that of thinking, considering, evaluating, planning and serving as a critical friend to the head of school" (p. 15).

School governance is fundamentally bound by the local and national expectations, goals, and trends for schooling (Wiseman, 2015). Similar to schools in every national system, international schools have some form of governing body. However, international schools have a high degree of autonomy relative to their national counterparts (Hodson & Chuck, 2015; James & Sheppard, 2014). The high level of autonomy, coupled with the increasing number and variety of international schools coming on stream, creates a high level of complexity in attempting to understand governing bodies within the international school space. Part of this complexity arises as a function of the non-traditional nature of school community stakeholders, particularly in Type C international schools, and partly because of increasing globalization resulting in the commodification of schooling (Wiseman, 2015). It is well beyond the scope of this study to probe deeply into the complexities of international school governance or the effects of globalization on international

schooling. For the purpose of this study, it is sufficient to understand that every international school has a form of organizational governance, and that a strong and positive relationship between the governing body and the executive leadership is crucial in promoting leadership succession planning and management (Rothwell, 2016, p. 57). In spite of decades of research on succession planning, all is not well with the state of the art in leadership succession planning.

Hooijberg and Lane (2016) state the fundamental problem with the current preparedness of boards in relation to executive leadership succession: “The strategic importance of CEO succession is indisputable, and the elements of effective succession planning have long been known. So why do many boards plan poorly for CEO succession when the cost of failure is so high” (p. 14). Hooijberg and Lane (2016) conducted an explanatory mixed methods research study of 124 board members from global organizations. Their questions were focused on the board member’s perceptions of their organization’s leadership succession planning preparedness and effectiveness and included an in-depth qualitative interview of 20 of the 124 board members. Their findings exposed three key reasons for succession planning failure at the board room level: The first is a lack of alignment between the strategic needs of the organization and the hiring criteria of the future CEO; the second is a hesitancy on the part of the board to antagonize the CEO by introducing the discussion of succession planning; and the third is a lack of attention paid to the development of executives below the level of the CEO and their top executives (Hooijberg & Lane, 2016, p. 15). These problems are echoed by Cheloha (2015), who adds that because of the power dynamic between the CEO and the board, over time there can be corrosion in the relationship between the CEO and the board of directors leading to a relational impasse between the two (p. 8).



## **Leadership succession in educational contexts**

Richard Carlson (1961) was the first to study succession in the educational context. His contribution to the field of study considered the origin of superintendent successors, which is promotion from within the organization, versus the hiring of superintendents from outside the organization. His quantitative work looked at data from 209 school superintendent succession events from school divisions in California and Pennsylvania. The conclusion from his work indicated there was a significant difference between inside successors and outside successors in the value placed on career, as well as place of work. He stated insiders are place-bound, that is they value location over career advancement. Conversely, outsiders are career-bound, indicating they place career advancement over location. Regarding the relationship between the effectiveness and status of the successors and their origin, Carlson found that insiders make fewer changes, are compensated less, and do not enjoy as highly regarded status as outsiders (Carlson, 1961, p. 226).

Nearly 45 years after Carlson conducted his study, Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) published their findings from a significant longitudinal study on leadership succession in educational contexts. The *Change Over Time?* study provided a unique opportunity to explore changes in educational leadership, paying special attention to principal succession. The study used qualitative methods to gather 250 interviews with teachers and administrators working in eight schools in the US and Canada over a three-decade time frame from 1970 through to the end of the 1990s. Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) fundamentally determined that leadership succession is one of the most significant components contributing to the effectiveness of the school and the sustainability of its improvement efforts.

The authors discovered six significant factors standing in the way of effective school improvement *vis-a-vis* mismanaged leadership succession. First, there are too many flawed assumptions of leadership. The heroic image of leadership tends to be favored, with the “transformation”, and not the transformative style of the leader receiving the attention (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 163).

Second, Leadership succession is not isolated to a single person in space and time. Leaders are greatly influenced by their predecessors, and the many people who share the responsibility for leadership. Significant and lasting school improvement depends on understanding and utilizing the collective knowledge of those who have gone before, and those who share the current task (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 163).

Third, school improvement in the form of planned discontinuity, i.e. disrupting the status quo of either a cruising school, or a failing school is rarely handled well. A leader’s immediate success often leads to their promotion out of the position/school, which can stop the improvement process in its tracks. Instead of a focus on planned discontinuity, the improvement focus must be on planned continuity (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 165).

Fourth, rates of leader transience are increasing resulting in stalled or discontinuous school improvement and cynicism among staff. This condition must be slowed, and at the same time the tenure of the leader in the school must be lengthened (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 169).

Fifth, there is a preoccupation in almost all instances with inbound knowledge. This legitimizes the heroic image of the new leader, with staff waiting expectantly for the “new” mandate to shift the direction of the school. The nearly complete collective amnesia of previous school improvement initiatives contributes to stalled improvement efforts and further cynicism (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 169). Supporting this

view of outside heroes, and as an extension of Carlson's (1961) insider versus outsider discussion, Karaevli (2016) found that outsiders have been forced out of office 44% more often than insiders over the 10-year time frame of his study, which is coined as the "turnaround trap" (p. 278). In addition, compared to insiders, outsiders are nearly seven times more likely to be dismissed after a short tenure. In spite of an outsider's high motivation to quickly generate strategic change, the study reveals an interesting paradox: the organizational situation that typically drives the selection of an outsider over an insider, generally leads to the inbound leader's inability to generate substantial strategic change in the early years of his/her tenure (Karaevli, 2016, p. 278).

Finally, and perhaps most prominent, research suggests that the shifting educational focus on standardization and measurement has contributed to an emerging model of leadership that is reactive, compliant, and managerial. This new reality is underwriting a dearth of potential leaders who can inspire learning communities to promote higher learning for all students (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 175).

Following on Hargreaves and Goodson's work, Dean Fink (2006) used the Hargreaves study to look at the shifting role of principals during the span of the study. He considered the effects of these shifts on the schools and the principal's efforts at school improvement. Fink (2006) expanded on the work of Hargreaves and Goodson by providing much of the missing detail that was excised from the Hargreaves article for journalistic brevity making the Fink article the necessary companion for a full understanding of the methodology of Hargreaves and Goodson's study. Additionally, more qualitative narratives are presented providing deeper insight into staff perceptions of the leadership transitions.

The Fink study indicates that increasing rates of principal turnover, as a function of an aging baby boom generation, principals' mobility, and the pressures of the standardization assessment programs have created additional difficulties. These elements combine to threaten the sustainability of school improvement efforts and undermine the capacity of incoming and outgoing principals to lead their schools. Fink makes three suggestions for improving the situation: the possibility of assigning longer principal tenures to those schools that have recently started to show significant school-wide success in order to safeguard the continued improvement efforts (Fink, 2006, p. 84); create and guard support systems for newly appointed principals that can pass on, share, and develop the essential inbound knowledge of incoming leadership; and avoid at all costs the necessity for hasty, ad hoc succession events (Fink, 2006, p. 84). This would require the planning and implementation of succession plans that attend to the entire leadership team making successful succession a shared, distributed responsibility. Both the conclusion and the evidence provided are compelling and are very persuasive.

### **Event System Theory**

A well-substantiated theory has within itself the power to explain and to meet the objectives of prediction and understanding of conditions and relationships among and between independent and dependent variables of interest. The *event* known as leadership succession has a long and rich academic history, dating back to 1960 with Oscar Grusky's seminal study of administrative succession. It is interesting to note that Grusky (1960) chose not to view succession through a theoretical lens, since "a rigorous and logically-tight theory of administrative succession may not be either essential or desirable at this stage" (p. 106). At the time Grusky was writing about succession, he was actually more interested in an "adequate orientation to the

problem” (p. 106). Since 1960, the topic of leadership succession has progressed well past the point of simply requiring an “adequate orientation.” This study will be located on a theoretical framework, known as Event-System Theory (EST).

EST draws from the deep vault of Open System Theory, then extends Open System Theory by providing an explanation of when, where and how events affect both the behavior and features of organizational entities, ultimately leading to subsequent events (Morgeson, Mitchell, & Liu, 2015, p. 515). Katz and Kahn (1978) define Open System Theory as the process by which organizations import energy from their environment, transform it, and then export the transformed product back into the environment. Figure 4 represents the basic Open System model conceptually.

#### Basic Open System Theory Model

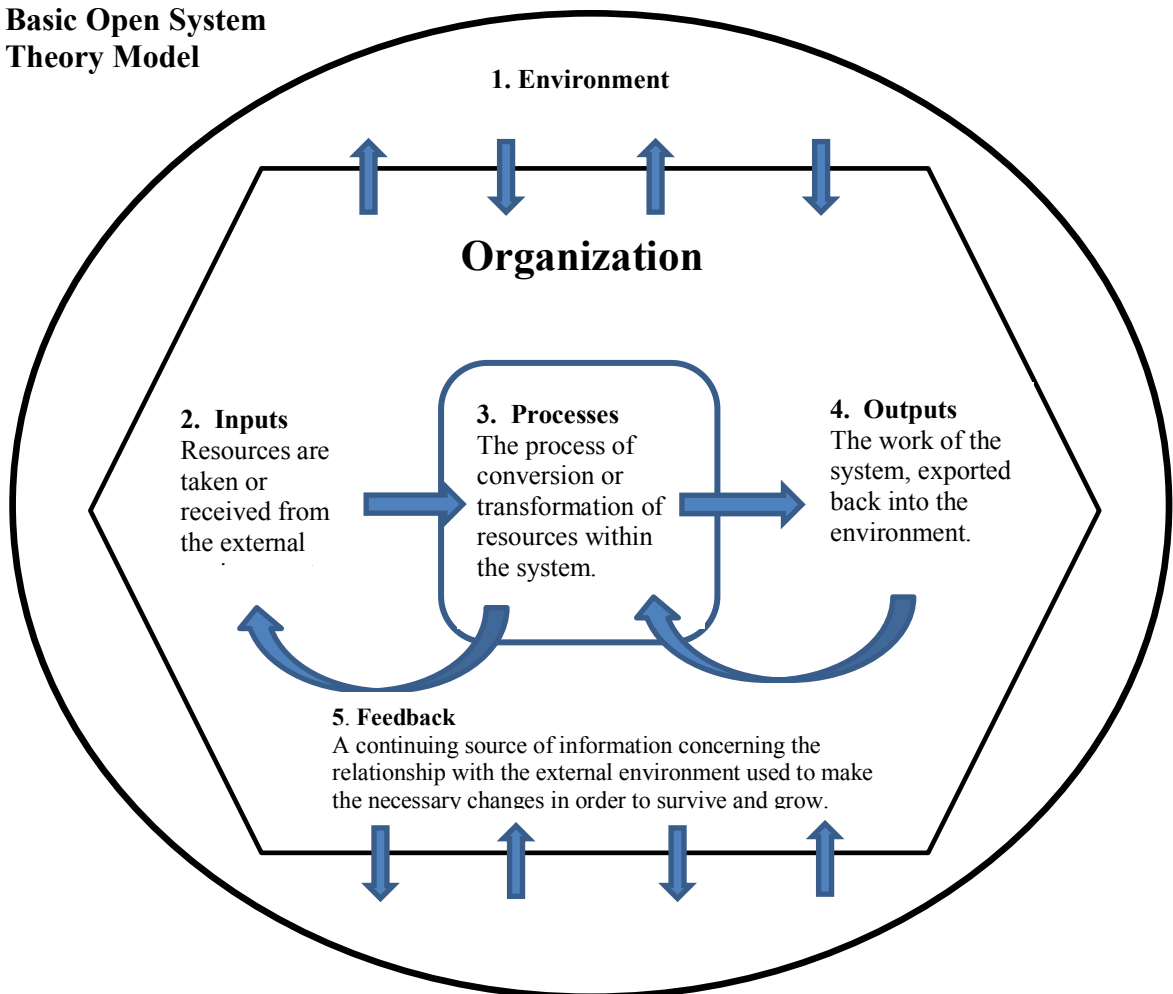


Figure 4: Basic Open System Theory

The main focus in Open System Theory is the recurring events that help to maintain a steady state and enable routine organizational functioning (Miller & Rice, 2013; Rice, 2013). However, non-routine or episodic events which are novel and critical, like the succession of a leader, unanticipated or not, have the strength to change organizational functioning. Open System Theory does recognize events as part of the fabric of an organization, but it does not specifically account for the nature of the event, its novelty or its criticality. Therefore, to address this apparent gap, EST facilitates a focus on both the nature of the event and how the event commands attention and impact organizational behaviors, features, and subsequent events across levels and time. In EST, events can influence organizational entities through changing or creating three distinct features: the individual or collective behaviors, the features with an organization, and subsequent events (Morgeson, Mitchell, & Liu, 2015, p. 515).

In the field of education, Bastedo (2006) suggests that Open System Theory has profoundly changed how both schools as organizations, as well as the demands placed upon their educational leaders, are viewed in their wider environment (p. 712). The focus of Open System Theory has been on the recurring events that help create a steady state and enable routine organizational functioning (Miller & Rice, 2013; Rice, 2013). Less attention has been paid to non-routine events and how they can change organizational functioning. To address this gap, EST focuses on how events command attention and impact organizational behaviors, features, and subsequent events across levels and time. Schools – both international and national - are situated within their socio-economic-political ecosystem; they are organizations that transform input energy, filtering it back into the environment and, at the same time, are influenced by the environment in which they are located. The intersection of EST and

Open System Theory opens the door for a more refined analysis of the leadership succession event, and the ultimate impact(s) of this event on the international school environment.

Pillemer (2001) offers, “in every life, the ongoing stream of mundane daily occurrences is punctuated by distinctive, circumscribed, highly emotional and influential episodes.” (p. 123). Grusky (1960) was the first to suggest leadership succession “always leads to organizational instability and it is a phenomenon that all organizations must cope with” (p. 105). The advantage of using EST as a framework to analyze leadership succession events is twofold: firstly, there is the proposition that certain events command immediate attention, which is known as the event strength; secondly, event strength can be explained by three continua: novelty, disruptiveness, and criticality (Morgeson, et al., 2015). There will be more on event strength to come. At this juncture, it is important to define an event before discussing the nature and characteristics of an event.

If EST is to have any predictive power, it is important that the term *Event* have a workable definition within the context of this study. Since the context of this study is focused on the organization in general, the international school specifically, the nature and definition of an event takes on a specific definition. Broadly speaking, Events are “discrete, discontinuous ‘happenings,’ which diverge from the stable or routine features of the organizational environment” (Morgeson, et al., 2015, p. 519). This definition of events is useful and workable. However, some refinement is required if it is to be used in the context of the international school. Within the context of the international school, and for the purpose of this study, the Event is understood as the succession of the school director. Furthermore, the Event is refined to reflect three distinct elements: the Event is contextually bounded and is external to

the perceiver, the Event is bounded in space and time, and the Event is result of the convergence of actions of a single entity on another entity, or the actions of multiple different entities (Morgeson, et al., 2015, p. 520).

In addition to a refined definition of Events, it is necessary to define the qualitative nature of Events on the organization. Events can be described by their impact strength within the contextual environment. Events occur routinely in every organization, from the routine to the most novel. Routine events have little to no impact whereas novel events command attention and action. In the context of this study, leadership succession is considered a novel event with periodicity in the life an international school. To fully appreciate the nature of the Event strength of leadership succession, EST is focused on the characteristic of the Event with three key characteristics: novelty, disruption, and criticality (Morgeson, et al., 2015, p. 521).

Following on a refined definition of Events, it is necessary to define the qualitative nature of Events on the organization by discussing the Event strength, which is broadly defined by the impact strength within the contextual environment. Events occur routinely in every organization, from the routine to the most novel. Routine events have little to no impact whereas novel events command attention and action. In the context of this study, leadership succession is considered a novel event with periodicity in the life an international school. To fully appreciate the nature of the Event strength of leadership succession, EST is focused on the characteristic of the Event with three key characteristics: novelty, disruption, and criticality (Morgeson, et al., 2015, p. 521).

Novelty reflects the extent to which an event varies from the norm and is perceived as new or unexpected. It helps an Event stand out and stimulates in-depth reflection from the perceives of the Event. Disruption signals a discontinuity in the



contextual environment indicating a change from the steady state. The disruptive nature of the Event demand further analysis of behaviors and routines, requiring the organization to adjust and adapt (Morgeson, et al., 2015; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012). Disruption is measured qualitatively, or by degree of change. Disruptive events may block the flow of ongoing routines in the organization (Morgeson, et al., 2015, p. 520). In the context of the international school, disruption due to succession can lead to stalled school improvement efforts. Finally, Event criticality reflects the degree to which an Event is important and essential. The more critical an Event is, the more unusual attention will need to be paid to the event (Morgeson, et al., 2015, p. 520). This is easily reflected in the “call to action” typically sounded after the announcement of a leadership succession.

Event criticality is a reflection of “the degree to which an event is important, essential, or a priority” (Morgeson & DeRue, 2006, p. 273). In other words, the more critical an Event, the more it will likely be understood by the community as requiring unusual attention and action (Morgeson, et al., 2015). Taken together, novelty, disruptiveness, and criticality form the basis for event strength, and in turn present the best approach to explaining the effects of both anticipated and unanticipated leadership succession on the wider community.

EST is the lens through which all the findings of this study can be viewed. Each participant holds their own perception of the Event strength of leadership succession, and they will relate their perceptions of novelty, disruption and criticality as they offer their comments during the interviews. Once the findings have been gathered and analyzed, EST enables the reader to more fully appreciate the nature of leadership succession.

## **Conclusion**

Understanding leadership succession in the context of international schools certainly begins with a reading tour through as much of the available research on succession as possible. In the case of leadership succession, six decades of research offers a deep well of literature to draw from. By considering the research stream chronologically, the reader is well positioned to appreciate the emergence of the field by understanding what early researchers like Grusky and Carlson were concerned with; theirs was truly exploratory research in those early days. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the early stream of succession research was the focus on the succession history of major league baseball teams. In spite of the unusual context, significant strides were made in those early explorations.

Since those early beginnings, much work has been accomplished, both qualitative and quantitative. The 1970s was a decade of theory building with gains in key streams of interest like antecedents of succession, patterns of succession, successor characteristic, and board involvement in succession. Helmich and Pfeffer led the way with research on successor origin, with specific focus on the insider vs. outsider dichotomy as it relates to the strength of the succession event.

The 1980s and 1990s brought further improvement and refinement for both theory and research. Of notable interest was the confirmation of findings relating increased rates of succession to poor organizational performance. These findings are remarkable and highly connected to this study because the implication of poor organizational performance in the international school context directly translates to lower student achievement. The research stream continues to remain a fruitful avenue for scholars into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is evident progress in the field of executive

succession, particularly in the contextual understanding of processes leading to succession events.

The review of research literature linked directly to international schools is not as robust as it one might expect, but there is certainly a body of work worth exploring. Researchers of these unique schools provide a rich body of research linked to the rising diversity, and by extension, the increased complexity of the international school space. International school leadership and governance are two critical research foundations on which a significant component of this study rests. The influence of quality educational leadership on student achievement is one of the elements of the conceptual framework of this study. Fortunately for this study, there is a good deal of quality educational research available in this critical area to draw from.

Finally, Event System Theory (EST) provides an excellent lens through which to view every aspect of leadership succession. By viewing succession as an event with corresponding disruptive strength, the reader is given a viable mechanism by which to understand the turbulent nature of succession, and the ripples of uncertainty that naturally flow outwards from the epicenter of the disruption into the surrounding school constituencies. With a rich body of literature, leadership succession can be understood in its total breadth and depth.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods**

“In research as in art, there can be no single ideal standard. Beauty no less than ‘truth’ is in the eye of the beholder, and the beholders of research and evaluation can include a plethora of stakeholders: scholars, policymakers, funders, program managers, staff, program participants, journalists, critics, and general public. Any given design inevitably reflects some imperfect interplay of resources, capabilities, purpose, possibilities, creativity, and personal judgements by the people involved. Research, like diplomacy, is the art of the possible” (Patton, 1990, p. 12).

#### **Introduction**

The review of literature in the previous chapter began with a statement about the three propositions on which this study is based: first, the fundamental work of every school, international or national, is the decisive promotion of student achievement (DuFour & Marzano, 2015); second, the uninterrupted flow of talented, knowledgeable, and well prepared educational leadership can only happen by the purposeful forecasting of leadership needs based on the strategic goals of the school; and third, succession planning and management is the primary work of the governing body and the executive leader of the international school (Hodson & Chuck, 2015; Hooijberg & Lane, 2016). These propositions form the conceptual framework for my literature review, which represents an integrated method of viewing the problem of leadership succession in international schools (Imenda, 2014, p. 187). The work of various educational researchers is helpful and necessary in establishing a solid foundation upon which to rest these propositions.

The third chapter of this dissertation presents the methodology and methods for this study. Decisions about study methodology and methods have been made

carefully, with two main goals: to guarantee that decisions relating to study design are focused on advancing the statement of study purpose and ensuring the study is worth doing, while also providing a basis from which to justify both the study, and the resulting conclusions which issue from it (Maxwell, 2013).

### **Statement of study purpose and research questions**

Sociologists William Isaac Thomas (1863 – 1947) and Dorothy Swaine Thomas (1899–1977) framed the Thomas theorem in 1928, which is based on the concept of subjective interpretation and perceptions. Thomas and Thomas (1928) stated “If [people] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (p. 572).

Although the Thomas theorem is neither the conceptual nor the theoretical framework on which this study is built, the Thomas Theorem underscores the importance of subjectivity and perception and offers an interesting and useful lens by which to assess the relative importance of the topic within the “governing control center” of the international school environment. Succession planning and management in any international school, if it exists at all, is a product of strategic planning. Strategic planning is fundamentally a process by which the senior leadership and the governing body of the school respond to a rapidly changing world in order to deliver the school’s mission and meet the objectives of a sustainable future (Chuck, 2015, p. 47). It is the combined understandings and perceptions of the governing members of the school that acknowledge the importance and necessity of succession planning and management, and ultimately drive the planning forward. Therefore, the purpose of this multiple sample study is to determine the current state of the art in the process of leadership succession planning and management (SP&M) in international schools. For clarity and simplicity, the senior executive leader in the role of the school director, and the board chairperson, as a representative of the governing body of the

school, respectively represent the unit of study. The following research questions assist to focus the study:

Q1. Within the boundaries of the three sample schools, what are the director and Board Chair person's perceptions and understandings of planning and management for director leadership succession events?

Q2. In what ways have past school leadership succession events been a disruptive influence in the life of the three sample schools, and what is the nature of the disruption?

Q3. In what ways are sample schools actively engaged in strategic succession planning, and what elements of that strategy, if any, have been effective?

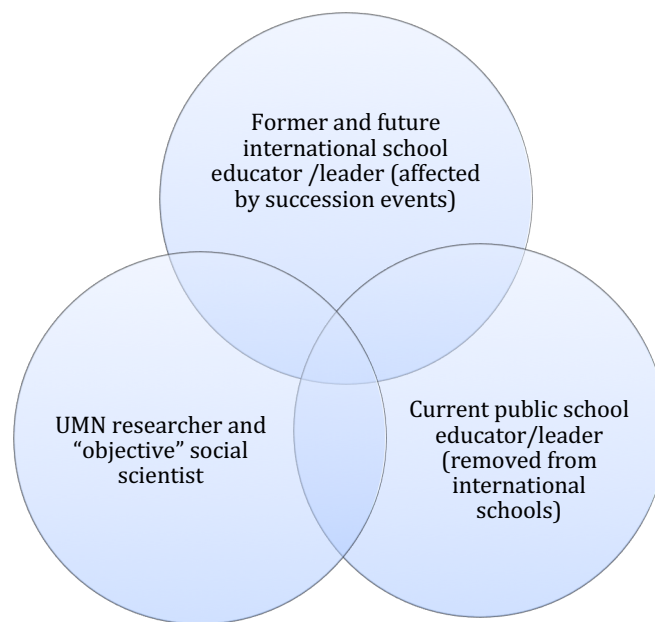
### **Researcher's Positionality and Value Premises**

In the novel, *You Can't Go Home Again*, by Thomas Wolf, the author tells the story of a fledgling writer who writes a book that makes several references to his hometown. The book becomes a national success but the fledgling writer is shaken by the overwhelming anger that greets him on his return home. Family and friends feel exposed by what they perceive to be a misleading exposé of their lives; the young writer is ultimately driven from his hometown. Similarly, I am a product of the very same environment in which my study is located. Therefore, it is important to account for my beliefs and my insider status within the international school landscape.

Wiederhold (2015) problematizes the academic's sense of "home" and the researcher's awareness of their positionality as "insider" by emphasizing there is a significant difference between researchers who connect with their participants based on certain commonalities and those researchers who "experience the mutual familiarity of sharing a personal history, a social network, and an assumed place-based investment in the future with their participants" (p. 601). Researchers who

conduct research within their perceived ‘home’ bring their own version of stories, experiences, and knowledge of key people, and significant places (Wiederhold, 2015).

I am not currently an international school leader/educator, but I certainly was one for a significant period of time. After eight years of living and teaching internationally, I continue to identify strongly as an international educator. Therefore, in the interest of objectivity, a full disclosure of my own positionality is necessary. To assist, *Figure 5* offers a visual by which to locate my position within this context, and to understand the forces that act on me in a multitude of ways. I stand at the center of three separate, but equally potent intersecting professional identities. My interest in leadership succession in international schools comes from my lived experience of what, in retrospect, can only be rationalized as ad hoc, unmanaged, and reactionary leadership succession in all three international schools in which I worked.



*Figure 5: The three lives of the researcher.*

It is from these experiences that this dissertation emerges in an earnest desire to understand the nature of leadership succession in international schools. My general views on leadership succession planning and management is founded on four

strongly held beliefs which are supported by academic research: the importance and necessity for transparent governance vis-à-vis Principal-Agent Theory (Bovens, Goodin, & Schillemans, 2014, p. 90); succession events must be anticipated and codified in organizational policy vis-à-vis the strategic planning imperative of the governing board (Hodgson, & Chuck, M. 2015, p. 47); leadership succession planning and management begins the day the new leader assumes the position and they must be completely hands-on in role (Rothwell, 2016, p. 130); unmanaged leader succession events are a recurring and significant problem in international schools as they disrupt student learning, stall school improvement, and destabilize the IS community (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012, p. 144).

The ultimate choice of study methodology ought to be motivated by the researcher's study goals and their philosophical disposition (Maxwell, 2013). Before providing a detailed accounting of the study methodology, a brief synopsis of my philosophical orientation is necessary. My perspective is primarily constructivist, tempered with equal parts ontological realism and positivism (Maxwell, 2013). The nature of this study is to understand the fundamental meanings, beliefs, and behaviors of the participants who embrace their own understandings of the study topic as comprehended through their lived realities. It is understood that meaning drives belief, belief drive behaviors, and behaviors drive results. This chain begins with meaning, which is fundamental to the interpretive nature of the research (Maxwell, 2013). A Constructivist approach to social science research promotes three fundamental propositions: knowledge arises from social processes and interactions; the social science researcher is not distinct from their subject matter; and the researcher acts as an interpreter, mediator and/or communicator in this world, (Creswell, 2014). The goal of social science researcher "is to rely as much as possible



on the participants' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell 2014, p. 8). These "views" act as portholes that allow the researcher to provide an explanation of the phenomenon.

The goal of this research study is to allow participant's views of succession planning and management to emerge. While the views of each individual participant are important and necessary to this study, the third research question is designed to understand how the perceptions of the head of school and their board counterpart compare and contrast. It is hoped this specific pool of information will lead to a deeper understanding of crucial factors influencing succession planning and management and where perceptions between the head of school and the governing bodies converge and deviate. With this in mind, I am engaging in a Qualitative Research study with the primary goal of hearing the voices of those closest to the study problem and examining critical artifacts in the form of organizational policy documents.

### **Study methodology**

Chapter three presents the methodology and specific methods for gathering the necessary study data. The intentional display of the research design is to provide an experienced researcher with enough information about the study design in order to replicate the study. Study replication is the gold standard for research design, which is echoed by the American Psychological Association's code of ethics standard 8.10a that states, "the essence of the scientific method involves observations that can be repeated and verified by others" (retrieved from American Psychological Association ethics code updates, 2010). Notwithstanding the replication imperative, it is understood that replicating research in highly contextualized environments such as schools will be challenging. Therefore, the appeal for replicability is understood to

be more a call for transparency in process and procedures rather than a study replication algorithm.

At the end of this study there are core findings; it is helpful and necessary for the reader to know how these conclusions materialized. Faced with a significant number of methodological alternatives, the social science researcher is faced with the challenge of selecting an appropriate methodology, and the suitable study methods. Therefore, in order to make a decision about study design and associated methods it is necessary to contemplate the *raison d'être* of the statement of study purpose and related research questions in order to link to an appropriate methodology (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015; Maxwell, 2013).

To assist with this, a brief review of the statement of study purpose (SSP) and the research questions is helpful. The purpose of this study is to determine recurring themes influencing the process of leadership succession in international schools. The following research questions assist to focus the study:

Q1. Within the boundaries of the three sample schools, what are the director and Board Chair person's perceptions and understandings of planning and management for director leadership succession events?

Q2. In what ways have past school leadership succession events been a disruptive influence in the life of the three sample schools, and what is the nature of the disruption?

Q3. In what ways are sample schools actively engaged in strategic succession planning, and what elements of that strategy, if any, have been effective?

Key words and phrases embedded within the SSP and the research questions act as markers indicating a possible methodological way forward. Words and phrases

like *determine recurring themes, perceptions, understandings, to what extent, and finally what is the nature, guide and influence the methodological decisions.*

An equally important factor in choosing the appropriate methodology and methods is the fact that there is a paucity of academic scholarship relating to the study purpose, i.e., leadership succession planning and management in international schools. Given the lack of academic discourse on this topic of inquiry, and the nature of the vocabulary embedded in the SSP and research questions, there is a strong case to be made for an exploratory research design, which is characterized as an attempt to gain a better understanding of the nature and dimensions of the problem being studied (Rwegoshora, 2016, p. 17). For these reasons, and for reasons I discuss in more detail in the methods section, I am conducting a qualitative research study in order to explore and understand the nature of the current situation for succession planning and management in international schools. Qualitative research is also a perfect methodology for coding and cataloguing the perceptions, meaning and understanding that individuals (international school directors and their governing board chair counterparts) ascribe to the phenomenon of leadership succession planning and management in international schools, and how these perceptions translate into a theory of action within each individual context school. To this end, my choice of method is the multiple sample study.

### **Research design and selected methods**

“Qualitative research design, to a much greater extent than quantitative research, is a ‘do-it-yourself’ rather than ‘off-the-shelf’ process, one that involves ‘tacking’ back and forth between the different components of the design, assessing their implications for one another” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 3). Utilizing a map that presents the five components of qualitative study design visually presents the research

design for this study. Maxwell (2013) refers to this map as an interconnected and flexible interactive model (p. 5). I have utilized this model to conceptually map my study design in Figure 6.

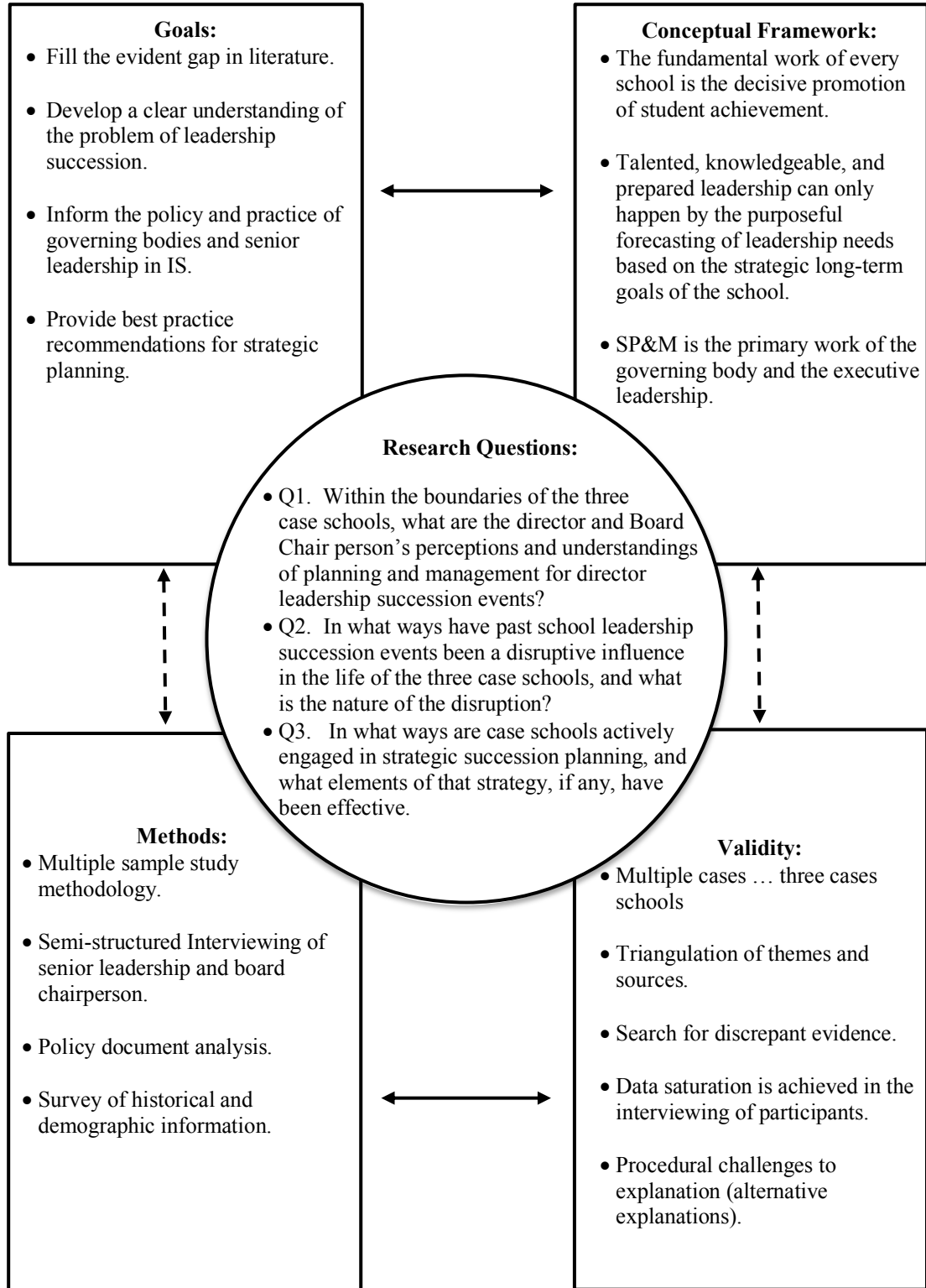


Figure 6: An interactive model of research design

The primary advantage of utilizing a model of this nature is that it communicates a great deal and needs little explanation; nevertheless, some clarification is warranted. To begin, it is helpful to see this model as two triangles: the top triangle involves the interplay between the goals, the conceptual framework, and the research questions; the bottom triangle is represented by the interaction of the research questions, methods, and validity. The top triangle is the conceptual half of the model, and the bottom is the operational half. It is important to recognize that connections between the components are neither rigid or rule-bound; the connections are elastic and provide a certain amount of “give” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 5).

A secondary advantage to using this interactive design model is in the presentation of a coherent study pathway. One can imagine a Z-path connecting the study goals with the conceptual frame, then transiting through the research questions to the methods, and ultimately terminating at validity. Naturally, as with any research design, there is a constant feedback loop informing the researcher as they make progress. At any point or time in the research the reflective social scientist is compelled to circle back and revisit, rethink, and revise elements of the study design if necessary. Ultimately, any conceptual mapping of this nature can only be seen as a highly-condensed schematic; it cannot be a substitute for a more detailed explanation of the research design (Maxwell, 2013, p. 9).

In the interest of accuracy and transparency, I will not be conducting multiple case study as this methodology requires a much deeper and complex “top to bottom” analysis of each case. Case study methodology involves much more detail of the entire organization than is necessary for the purpose of this study. Since the study questions are related to perceptions and understandings of the key actors in the most senior leadership in each school, it is unnecessary to dive deeply into every

hierarchical level of each school. For this reason, I cannot call this a multiple case study. However, in deciding on an appropriate methodology, I have found it useful to access the rigor and the structure of case study methods. The remainder of this chapter fully explains the research design in more detail.

### **Sample Study Methodology**

Scholars have long recognized the usefulness of case studies for hypothesis generation and theory development (George and Bennet, 2005; Weller and Barnes 2016). Stake (2000) offers a counter argument for case study research as he advocates that the value of case study research is in its capacity to focus the attention of the researcher entirely on the case. It is the optimal understanding of the case itself, rather than opportunities to generalize beyond the case that have real lasting value (p. 436). According to Yin (2013), case study is the preferred method when studying contemporary events when relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated (p. 12).

Stake (2000) indicates that case studies have become a popular and effective way to conduct qualitative research. However, Stake (2000) provocatively suggests that case studies are “neither new, nor essentially qualitative”, and that “case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied” (p. 435). To put it another way, case study research is defined as a deep interest in the individual cases, and not by the various methods associated with it. By way of a formal definition, case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context (Yin, 2017; Flyvbjerg, 2007). Another view of case study suggests it is an inquiry design in which the researcher develops a close-up analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or possibly one or more individuals. (Creswell, 2014, p. 14). In other words, conducting qualitative research using the method of case study offers a research advantage when there is a desire to

understand a real-world phenomenon, and that such an understanding is founded in contextualized conditions that are pertinent to the case (Yin, 2017, p. 16).

Nevertheless, Yin (2017) cautions the would-be social scientist intent on conducting a case study with a bilateral warning: the researcher must acknowledge and account for the strengths and limitations of case study research, and it is up to the researcher to explain how they are going to follow a rigorous methodological pathway (p. 2-3). Having been duly warned, the challenge in this section is twofold: present a clearly stated research design with rationale for the various choices I make, and account for the assorted challenges of conducting a multiple sample study, vis-à-vis Yin's cautions.

### **Limitation and Objections to Case Study Research**

Using the accepted definition of case studies as stated above, one arrives at the reasonable conclusion that case studies have been around as long as recorded history. Historical accounts are nothing more than an individual unit of study bounded by time and place. Furthermore, much of what we know about the empirical world has been produced by case study research. However, despite the ubiquity of this genre of documentation, the use of case study in social science research is not without a significant amount of controversy. Flyvbjerg (2007) emphatically refers to the controversy as a paradox when he states, "At the same time that case studies are widely used and have produced canonical texts, it may be observed that the case study as a methodology is generally held in low regard, or is simply ignored, within the academy."

Flyvbjerg (2007) identifies five misunderstandings about the use of case studies in social science research that "systematically undermine the credibility and use" of the case approach in academic research:

- Misunderstanding 1: Generalized, theoretically developed knowledge is more valuable than empirical case knowledge.
- Misunderstanding 2: A single individual case cannot lead to a generalization, which cannot contribute to the general scientific body of knowledge.
- Misunderstanding 3: The case study is only useful for generating a hypothesis, while other research methods are better suited to hypothesis testing and theory building.
- Misunderstanding 4: There is a bias towards verification of a researcher's preconceived notions.
- Misunderstanding 5: It is difficult to develop general propositions and theories on specific cases studies.

When the five misunderstandings are properly viewed as a whole, it is evident that these misunderstandings speak generally to the perceived lack of theory building, reliability, and validity which are fundamental elements of the scientific method (Flyvbjerg, 2007, p. 302).

Yin (2017) echoes the concerns of Flyvbjerg (2007) relating to issues of research rigour and generalization, but he also offers two further concerns: the potentially unmanageable level of effort in conducting true case study research, and questions of comparative advantage relative to other methodologies. Regarding investment of effort in conducting a case study, there are real concerns over the length of time to complete a case study and the resulting documentation from an overly long study. This may be a legitimate concern based on the possible confusion of case study with the data collection method of ethnography, which require long periods in the field (Yin, 2017, p. 21). The second concern Yin highlights relates to the unclear



comparative advantage of case study relative to other better-understood methodologies, such as the randomized controlled trials (RTC), known as “true experiments” (Yin, 2017, p. 21). What has been misunderstood is that case studies can offer important insights into experimental results that RTCs are not able to deliver, which is how and why a given treatment or intervention may be effective, or not (Yin, 2017, p. 21).

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to dive deeply into all case study objections. Still, a brief rebuttal of each is necessary as this study is founded on a multiple case study methodology, and any findings from this study should be able to withstand the criticism of possible alternative methodological choices.

Misunderstanding 1: Generalized, theoretically developed knowledge is more valuable than empirical case knowledge. There are two ways to view case study research in the face of this criticism: the first suggests that the nature of case studies bounded, contextualized, and focused on a single phenomenon, parallels basic learning and is a necessary condition for moving from empirical knowledge to formulating generalizable knowledge; secondly, in social science research, which is primarily focused on the study of human affairs, there is no opportunity for social science to imitate the natural sciences in developing epistemic theory. (Flyvbjerg, 2007, p. 304).

Misunderstanding 2: A single individual case cannot lead to a generalization, which cannot contribute to the general scientific body of knowledge. To begin, it may be useful to remind the reader of the term *Wissenschaft* from the German language. This German term means science, but the Merriam-Webster dictionary translates the word literally to “learning” or “to gain knowledge.” With this in mind, if the goal of conducting a case study is to learn or to gain knowledge about a specific

phenomenon, then the social scientist is not only ‘doing science’ but is also contributing to the general body of knowledge in the process.

Exploratory research is frequently attributed to Karl Popper, although it originally stems from the work of Reichenbach (1938), who was a realist about the external world and asserted that we can only have uncertain knowledge about the world inferred from sensory data (Glymour & Eberhardt, 2008). Karl Popper presented the classic rejection of empiricism, based on an inductive approach to the scientific method. He stated, “the criterion of the scientific status of a theory is its falsifiability, or refutability, or testability” (Popper, 1963, p. 474). According to Popper, falsification is one of the most rigorous tests that any general theory could be subjected to. If there exists one single observation contrary to the proposition, then the proposition must be either revised or rejected. The case study is an ideal form of research for generalization, employing the falsification test. Popper’s classic example of the white swan proposition perfectly demonstrates how a case study could be used to identify any deviant cases, or “black swans” (Flyvbjerg, 2007, p. 305).

Misunderstanding 3: The case study is only useful for generating a hypothesis, while other research methods are better suited to hypothesis testing and theory building. This assertion is closely related to the second objection of case study in that one cannot generalize on the basis of individual cases. George and Bennet (2005) present a cogent and emphatic rebuttal in stating that case studies are particularly well suited to theory development because of the ability of case studies to process-trace the links between causes and outcomes, explore hypothesised causal mechanisms, develop and test historical explanations, recognize the sensitivity of concepts to contexts, and form new hypothesis and questions for further study based on the deviant cases (p. 6-9).

Strategic case selection is understood to be a potent antidote to this specific criticism. Hypothesis testing is fundamental to the question of generalizability and the best cases to test a hypothesis on are the deviant cases or “black swans” as Popper (1963) would suggest. In the words of Stake (2000), “Isn’t it better to learn a lot from an atypical case than a little from a seemingly typical case?” (p. 446). With respect to theory development, deviant cases are also particularly well suited for theory development because of the opportunity for researchers to explore and understand the limits of existing theories. In general, it is understood that the case approach to research benefits from the *a priori* development of theoretical propositions which then acts as a data collection guide (Yin, 2017, p. 17).

Misunderstanding 4: There is a bias towards verification of a researcher’s preconceived notions. This criticism is based on the assertion that case studies are deficient to other qualitative methods because they provide room for the researcher’s subjectivity to creep in. Experienced case researchers understand this critique as revealing a lack of knowledge of what it means to do rigorous case study research (Flyvbjerg, 2007, p. 309). Geertz (1996), states “‘the field’ itself is a powerful disciplinary force: assertive, demanding, even coercive. Like any such force, it can be underestimated, but it cannot be evaded” (p. 119).

If there is a force at work in case study research, it is one of bias towards falsification, and not verification (Flyvbjerg, 2007, p. 310). Because of the fact that case study researchers spend time getting close to the case and those associated with it, a rigorously developed case study enjoys the benefit of a built-in feedback loop, which provides the researcher with a constant check on understanding. This feature is most apparent during the semi-structured interviewing phase when the case literally

“talks back” to the researcher, offering correction and clarification (Flyvbjerg, 2007, p. 310).

Finally, misunderstanding 5: It is difficult to summarize and develop general propositions and theories on specific cases studies. To summarize is to provide a brief statement of the main points. In effect, summarizing is the act of developing a narrative of the main points of the case, and ultimately, proposing theories based on the narrative. Summarizing and retelling is the fundamental role of the case study researcher, but more than that, it is a basic characteristic of human storytelling. When researchers gather rich data through in-depth interviews, the information passes from the interviewee to the interviewer in the form of narrative. The researcher’s primary role is to listen carefully and mine the ‘stories’ for their deeper meaning (Chase, 2011, p. 422). However, there exists some danger in the human propensity for narrative. This danger has been called the narrative fallacy, which is the inclination to simplify data and information by over interpretation. The narrative fallacy is the product of a human preference for compact stories rather than complex data (Taleb, 2007, p. 63). Dense narratives based on thick descriptions can provide some protection against the narrative fallacy. However, the best protection against the error of narrative fallacy is systematic and rigorous checks for validity and reliability during data collection and data summary (Flyvbjerg, 2007, p. 311).

It is my wish for this study to provide a quantum of explanatory power in understanding the nature and state of leadership succession planning and management in international schools. As indicated, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to offer a deep analysis of all the limitations and objections of case study research. It would be equally problematic to ignore the literature on limitations and objections for the sake of providing a seemingly resistance-free description of case study methods.

By acknowledging and addressing each of the main objections I have provided an opportunity for the reader to understand the nature of case research and how data collected during the study can be trusted to be valid and reliable.

## **Methods**

Conducting rigorous exploratory sample study relies on multiple sources of evidence. Yin (2017) refers to six sources of evidence: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts (p. 106). For the purpose of this exploratory multiple sample study, I intend to base my research on semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and surveys of demographic and historical data. As a result of the comparatively small sample within my study design, I anticipate the very real possibility that there are many more variables of interest than data points. This situation has the potential to lead to the danger of narrative fallacy. However, as indicated, dense narratives based on thick descriptions provide some protection against the narrative fallacy. In general, the best protection against the error of narrative fallacy is systematic and rigorous checks for validity and reliability during data collection and data summary (Flyvbjerg, 2007, p. 311; Maxwell, 2013, p. 4), by actively searching for triangulation convergence within the collected data (Yin, 2013, p. 324; Yin, 2017, p. 17). Triangulation is considered to be a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation (Stake, 2000, p. 443; Yin, 2013, p. 324).

The interview is the preferred method for data collection in exploratory research (Bevan, 2014). Interviewing is the most widespread empirical research method across the human and social sciences (Brinkman, 2013). The benefit of using the interview method is that it resembles conversation with a consistent line of inquiry rather than

fully structured probing (Yin, 2017, p. 110). Semi-structured streams of questions are fluid, but also reflective and responsive as the conversation ranges. The fundamental assumption when utilizing semi-structured interviewing as a primary research method is that the meaning people make of their own experiences affect the way in which they carry out those experiences, which in turn is reflected in their explanation of those experiences. (Blumer, as cited in Seideman, 2013, p. 18).

In the body of qualitative interviewing there is an interesting gap between individual interviews, one-to-one interviews, and focus groups, which generally call for three or more participants. Missing in this continuum are dyadic interviews that bring the researcher together with two participants (Morgan, Carder, & Hoffman, 2013, p. 1276). This study requires collecting data from both the head of school and the governing body chairperson. It follows that a dyadic interview structure would offer an advantage in a study of this nature. One clear advantage relates to the spontaneity of conversation, as the interaction between participants acts as a catalyst, because a response from one participant will draw forth a further response from the other leading to richer data. This is very favorable in a semi-structured interviewing scenario. Nevertheless, dyadic interviews are not as problem-free as one would hope.

Since the main purpose of this study is to hear each person's voice as free as possible from any cross-influencing factors, the balance tips heavily in favor of individual interviews. One of the most significant problems of dyadic interviewing is the contaminating influence of social desirability. Given the organizational and hierarchical positions of each participant in this study, it is immediately apparent that data collection may be unfavorably affected due to the cross-contaminating influences of an individual's positional power and authority. Therefore, to ensure that power and position do not adversely influence the quality of the data, individual interviews are

used. Individual interviews will encourage participants to share information they may otherwise withhold if in a more public context, or more specifically, in the presence of the other's leadership counterpart (Morgan, et al, 2013, 1277).

The literature on interviewing as a qualitative research tool seems to present two contrasting images of the interviewer – the interviewer as a miner or the interviewer as a traveler. Siedman (2013) suggests a phenomenological approach to interviewing emphasizes the importance of making meaning of experience, or rather, the attempt to enrich lived experience by mining its meaning (p. 18). In this view, the interviewer as miner would treat knowledge as something valuable, but buried or hidden and in need of exposition. Alternatively, the metaphor of interviewer as traveler places the researcher on a journey in a distant land where tales of adventure and discovery are waiting to be told upon returning home (Kvale, & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 57). The two metaphors, researcher as traveler or researcher as miner, represent contrasting images of the researcher as well as competing ideals of interview knowledge. The miner understands the interview as a site for data collection separate from the subsequent data analysis. Whereas, the traveler imagines interviewing and data analysis as connected and intertwined; one informs the other. Likewise, while on the journey, the emphasis is on the narrative, which is constantly developing and is continually enhanced as the journey progresses (Kvale, & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 58).

Robert Louis Stevenson (1881) penned the adage “for to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive, and the true success is to labour” (retrieved from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/386/386-h/386-h.htm>). I believe that in academic research in general, and interviewing in particular, conversation and curiosity are very well paired. It is the process of constantly discovering that maintains the powerful impulse to keep the conversation going. The traveler metaphor best characterizes

how I see myself as a researcher. There is a strong hope the lived experiences of those participating in this study will help to cast a revealing light on the event of leadership succession for the express purpose of informing school policy, and in doing so, eradicate the unanticipated, unmanaged and too-frequent executive turnover which negatively impacts students' achievement (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013).

If the interview is a journey, then document analysis is the act of mining. The policy documents of case schools will be considered carefully and mined for policy information relating to strategic planning (Chuck, 2015) for leadership succession. Despite the codified information, the policy documents of case schools cannot tell the whole story on their own. Their usefulness lies in their ability to corroborate and augment evidence gathered from the semi-structured interviews (Yin, 2017, p. 107). On the other hand, should the documentary evidence contradict other findings from the same case, then further inquiry must be made in order to pursue any open questions (Yin, 2017, p. 107).

### **Sample Selection**

Purposefully selecting appropriate samples is central to sample study research and is a critical first step in data gathering (Gerring & Cojocaru, 2016 p. 393, Yin, 2017, p. 27). The fundamental issue in sample selection is whether the sample study aims for descriptive or causal inference. If the objective of the research is causal, sample studies may be further subdivided according to their specific function—exploratory, estimating, or diagnostic (Gerring & Cojocaru, 2016 p. 394). Specific exploratory techniques may be summarized as outcome, index, deviant, most-different, most-similar, or diverse (Gerring & Cojocaru, 2016 p. 398). Since this multiple sample study is exploratory in nature, the most-similar technique will be used for the selection of critical samples.



The most-similar technique is based on the premise that one can identify samples that exhibit strong similarities on background conditions (Z) but divergent outcomes (Y). The most-similar method relies on the identification of a small number of most-similar samples from a large population of potential samples based on matching algorithms that minimize differences on the (Z) (Nielsen, 2016). According to Nielson (2016) most-similar sample selection follows a five-step progression: (1) defining the relevant universe of sample, (2) identifying key variables of interest that should be similar across the target samples, (3) identifying a variable or variables that should vary meaningfully across the target samples, and (4) selecting the desired number of samples, often a pair but sometimes more, that have the specified similarities and differences. (Nielsen, 2016, p. 571).

Gerring and Cojocaru (2016) refer to the purposeful selection of samples as Algorithmic Case Selection (p. 411). Their algorithmic approach resembles Nielson's (2016) most-similar procedure for sample selection. Algorithmic sample selection follows a set procedure executed in sequence: define the research question, identify a sample of potential samples, identify and measure relevant variable of interest, construct a causal model (if required), and apply a sorting algorithm, which may be mathematical (Herron & Kevin, 2016) to identify samples.

What follows is an attempt to shadow the sample selection process defined by Nielson (2016) and Gerring and Cojucaru (2016) in selecting the samples for this study. Step one is to define the relevant universe of samples. For the purpose of this research study, the universe of samples in existence today is represented by every international school. However, as previously indicated, the number of international schools currently in existence has surpassed 8,000 units; only three samples are required for this multiple sample study. It is obvious that the first challenge will be to

utilize a procedure by which to “distill the universe” down to a manageable number of potential sample schools from which I can choose. To that end, I employ a three-step sub-algorithm for sample selection: I leverage my insider position to my advantage by considering only the schools with which I have a pre-existing professional relationship, I make a short list of potential samples based on identified background conditions (Z), vis-à-vis the most-similar technique, and finally, I draw from this short list three sample schools for inclusion in my study. Table 3 includes 14 schools with five identified background conditions. All listed schools have been anonymized for privacy using the NATO phonetic alphabet to replace the name of the school.

Background-based inclusion focuses on those specified school characteristics that act as a unifying agent between candidate schools. The most-similar technique has the advantage of controlling the candidates for unaccounted variability. As expected, by using a background-based protocol for school inclusion, a homogenizing effect occurs which forces the exclusion of a number of “easy access” schools.

Table 3: Possible sample schools for study inclusion.

<u>School</u>	<u>Geographic location</u>	<u>Profit motivation</u>	<u>K-12</u>	<u>IB authorized</u>	<u>Accreditation</u>
Alpha International School	Western Europe	Not-for-profit.	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> </ul>
Bravo International School	Western Europe	Not-for-profit.	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> </ul>
Charlie International School	Western Europe	Not-for-profit.	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> </ul>
Delta International School	Western Europe	Not-for-profit.	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> </ul>

Echo International School	Western Europe	Not-for-profit.	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> </ul>
Foxtrot International School	Western Europe	Not-for-profit	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> </ul>
Golf International School	Western Europe	For profit	Yes	Yes	No formal accreditation
Hotel International School	Asia	For profit	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> <li>• Singapore EduTrust</li> </ul>
India International School	Asia	For profit	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> <li>• Singapore EduTrust</li> </ul>
Juliet International School	Asia	For profit	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> <li>• Singapore EduTrust</li> </ul>
Kilo International School	Western Europe	Not-for-profit	Yes	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Middle states Association of Colleges and Schools</li> <li>• Mediterranean Association of International Schools</li> </ul>
Lima International School	Middle East	Not-for-profit	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> </ul>
Mike International School	North America	Not-for-profit	Yes	Yes – 2 of 3 programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AdvancED</li> <li>• Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico</li> <li>• SACS Southern Association of Schools and Colleges</li> </ul>
November International School	Asia	Not-for-profit	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges)</li> </ul>

The background conditions used to filter the candidate schools includes geographic location, profit motivation, K-12 programming, International Baccalaureate (IB) authorization, and accreditation status. Taken together, these criteria stand as a proxy for a minimum level of uniformity and, in the case of

accreditation, educational quality. Geography is a simple indicator on proximity. For the purpose of data gathering, it is logistically helpful to have candidate schools located within reasonable proximity of each other. In the case of my rubric, continental proximity is a sufficient indicator for geography.

Profit motivation is a more complex indicator as it points to the school ownership structure that ultimately influences strategic decisions, not the least of which is leadership succession. For-profit school ownership structures ultimately fall under three categories: individual proprietor, shareholder group, or ownership under a company banner (Hodgson, & Chuck 2015). Since net profit is the *raison d'être* of every business enterprise, the profit motive may potentially influence decisions relating to board member appointments. Ultimately, even the appointment of senior school leadership may be subject to potentially conflicting influences between the promise of future profit and the long-term development of students (Hodgson, & Chuck 2015). It is well beyond the scope of this study to consider the for-profit vs. the not-for-profit international school dichotomy and how it relates to leadership succession and school improvement. However, it is hoped that future studies in international school leadership succession will consider this question more fully.

The next two indicators, K-12 and IB are related and may be considered individually, or jointly. The IB is a program of studies that incorporates all grades K through 12 through three distinct programs: The Primary Years Program, the Middle Years Program, and the Diploma Program. However, it is possible for a school to be authorized to offer only the IB Diploma, which generally falls in grades 11 and 12. For the purpose of this rubric, IB authorization is another unifying agent. A school's subscription to the IB program of studies infers an acceptance of the mission and vision of the International Baccalaureate Organization. Flying the IB banner is a

potent symbolic signal to the international school market of a school's position on educational quality, student attainment, and international mindedness, vis-à-vis the IBO mission and vision statements (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

The final criterion is accreditation status. Accreditation is the process by which an outside accrediting organization provides a certification of competency, authority, and credibility. In the case of international schools, accreditation expresses an international school's commitment to high quality international education to prospective families, educational leaders, and teachers. The accrediting seal is also a signal of educational quality to universities, embassies, and organizations. There are several accrediting agencies operating worldwide. There is an apparent geographic regionalism at play, as accrediting bodies seem to have divided up the globe into sectors of influence. For example, there are four main American agencies: The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), the Middle States Association of Colleges, and Schools and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). In southern Europe, there is the Mediterranean Association of International Schools, and Singapore EduTrust confers a seal of quality assurance for all educational establishments on the island. The Council of International Schools (CIS) is a region-free organization that operates across all international borders at the behest of international schools seeking their stamp. Ultimately, international schools, regardless of their stated mission and vision, are bound by the rules and regulations of the nation states in which they are located. These governmental bodies have a significant say in how the school is to operate and how the school's diploma and certificates compare against the national high school diploma.

At this juncture, it is essential I state that each of these criteria are both important and effective in filtering the school list, but are, in reality, secondary considerations to the main element. The key element is the school's experience with succession. Each of the schools initially selected for inclusion in the study are chronologically well established and have had more than one head of school. This fundamentally means that each of these schools have a history of succession, which implies the head of school and the board chairperson are well qualified to discuss their leadership succession journey. Table 4 presents the candidate schools and the five criteria for inclusion.

Table 4: Sample schools to be considered after criterion reference.

<u>School</u>	<u>Geographic location</u>	<u>Profit motivation</u>	<u>K-12</u>	<u>IB authorized</u>	<u>Accreditation</u>
Alpha International School	Western Europe	Not-for-profit.	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> </ul>
Bravo International School	Western Europe	Not-for-profit.	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> </ul>
Charlie International School	Western Europe	Not-for-profit.	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> </ul>
Delta International School	Western Europe	Not-for-profit.	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> </ul>
Echo International School	Western Europe	Not-for-profit.	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> </ul>
Foxtrot International School	Western Europe	Not-for-profit	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> </ul>

The rubric offers a method to determine at a glance how the schools compare and contrast with each other. By way of this distillation, it is evident that international schools located in Western Europe appear to be the most homogeneous. Therefore, I have decided to include these schools in my study. In total, there are three international schools which will be candidate schools for my data collection.

Finally, from this list, three sample schools are selected. The final selection is based on the concept of the intrinsic case (Stake, 2000, p. 437). Table 5 provides the list of the chosen sample schools.

Table 5: Final list of sample schools after criterion reference

<u>School</u>	<u>Geographic location</u>	<u>Profit motivation</u>	<u>K-12</u>	<u>IB authorized</u>	<u>Accreditation</u>
Bravo International School (BIS)	Western Europe	Not-for-profit.	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> </ul>
Charlie International School (CIS)	Western Europe	Not-for-profit.	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> </ul>
Echo International School (EIS)	Western Europe	Not-for-profit.	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> </ul>

The intrinsic case (sample) is considered primarily to advance a particular facet of the sample. Ideally, the chosen samples are emblematic of a large population of samples, or more simply put, a case of something (Elman, Gerring, Mahoney, 2016, Stake, 2000). From the list of six available samples, I require three. In the spirit of full disclosure, it is at this stage that my insider status proves useful.

In social science research, the strategic choice of a sample greatly adds to the generalizability of the sample study (Flyvbjerg, 2007, p. 304). It is also understood

that qualitative researchers are most likely to detect features of a samples that are unusual in comparison with the relevant universe of samples (Seawright, 2016, p. 497). Therefore, in pursuit of the unusual and the interesting, I have settled on three sample schools, each offering a unique set of circumstances relating to recent leadership succession experiences: Bravo International School (BIS), Charlie International School (CIS), and Echo International School (EIS). A complete account of the context, background and leadership history of each school will be provided in chapter four. For the purpose of introduction, I provide a brief synopsis of why these schools have been chosen.

Bravo International School (BIS) was founded in the early 1960s. BIS serves over 1000 students representing 55 nationalities. The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) is offered in Grades 11 and 12. BIS has a long and successful history in its context and has had many leaders pass through its halls since its inception. Reasons for casing BIS relate to its longevity and the leadership style of the current head of school who is a noted and well regarded educational leader. The intrinsic value of casing BIS lies in its general success as an organization, which points to a governing body that have been good stewards of the school and have provided for the strategic growth of the school over its more than five decades of existence.

Charlie International School (CIS) was founded in the late sixties. CIS offers the IB Primary Years Programme (IBPYP), the IB Middle Years Programme (IBMYP) and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP). CIS has a student body less than half of the other two schools, but size of school is not a criterion for inclusion. CIS is a three-programme school and is designated as a World School by the International Baccalaureate Organization. Casing CIS is primarily



related to the current leader's succession history. This particular leader was a successful and well-regarded head of another European school of comparable size to AIS for over five years. At the start of the 2014 / 2015 academic year this individual announced his resignation to the faculty and staff on the very first day of new school term; his resignation would be effective at the end of the first semester. This succession event is unusual for two reasons: his unexpected announcement took the entire school community completely by surprise, leaving a leadership vacuum that would not be filled for the next eight months, and his decision to leave at the midpoint of the academic year was unusual in terms of typical head transitions. Both his unexpected announcement, and the subsequent vacuum created a significant challenge for the school. It should be noted that this succession event in particular offers an interesting element for discussion based on the duality of the disruptive nature of the secession event.

Echo International School (EIS) was founded in the sixties and is also considered an IB World School. EIS enrolls more than 1000 students comprising 65 nationalities. The intrinsic value of casing EIS is that it recently had a leadership succession event in 2015 that, by all accounts, transpired as smoothly and as purposefully as possible. It is hoped that in casing EIS will yield interesting data about the school's strategic planning relating to this recent leadership succession.

All three schools operate on purpose-built campuses and are fully accredited by both the Council of International Schools and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. Both accrediting bodies are global, independent, voluntary and non-profit membership organization. Accreditation demonstrates to the world that the school has achieved high standards of professional performance in international education and has a commitment to continuous improvement.

## **Data analysis strategies**

The data gathered in this multiple sample study has come from two sources: semi-structured interviews (primary source), and policy documents. The semi-structured interviews are the primary source of information, as they yield detailed information about perceptions, beliefs, behaviors, and historical background. The document analysis acted as support to corroborate the interview data. Since the interviews were the primary source of information, it is important to provide some detail on how the data were coded and indexed for analysis.

Data analysis for this multiple sample study occurred in two parts. The first part involved creating a verbatim written form of the interview data and identifying themes related to the study topic. The transcription was completed by a professional third-party service, which saved valuable time and ensured accuracy. Ideally, transcriptions need to be very detailed to capture critical features of conversation such as emphasis, speed, tone of voice, timing and pauses, but these elements are difficult to express in a simple paper transcription. Nevertheless, transcription is the best objective method for capturing what is said during the interview. However, what is said is not all that counts. The meanings of utterances are profoundly shaped by the way in which something is said in addition to what is said. It is also important to note that transcribers are not familiar with industry-specific vocabulary, jargon, or acronyms and may be misunderstood during transcription. Therefore, after the transcription was completed, audio recordings were checked against the transcripts for accuracy.

The second part involved analyzing the transcript data for emergent themes. In order to accommodate this process in an efficient and systematic manner, Nvivo was utilized to assist with the codification of the data. Nvivo is a qualitative data

analysis computer software package produced by QSR International. Its primary purpose is to assist qualitative researchers working with rich text-based information. Nvivo is a powerful tool in the coding process by helping to sort and organize unstructured interview data into relevant themes. Once the data was coded, the software powerfully enabled the researcher to classify, sort and arrange information, and examine relationships in the data.

These codes are primarily of two forms: *a priori* codes, which are based in a variety of factors such as previous research or theory, the research questions, and questions and topics from the interview protocol; the second are grounded codes, which are emergent themes in the data that were not accounted for *a priori*. The findings in this multiple sample study are based entirely on the emergent themes. While all emergent themes were considered important, only themes that emerged multiple times across multiple participants were considered sufficiently salient for analysis.

### **Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol guided the semi-structured interview with each participant. As this study is based on a semi-structured interview, the conversation ebbed and flowed organically. However, given the limited time frame and the number of protocol questions, when sufficient information was gathered on one question, the interviewer moved on the next question on the protocol. The protocol questions are as follows:

1. Please tell me what you understand about leadership succession in an international school.

2. Think back to a recent leadership succession event in an international school you were either directly or indirectly involved in. Please describe this event and tell me what your role in the event was.
3. Follow up on the last question, to the best of your recollection; please describe in as much detail as possible the effect of this succession event on the international school?
4. One possible component of succession planning is identifying and developing current hi-potential staff for specific positions... a.k.a. bench strength or leadership pipeline. Does your school have a strategy for building leadership? If so, please describe how you develop future leaders.
5. The international school market place is very competitive and very fast changing. Please describe how you manage leadership succession within such a shifting environment.
6. Does your school have a codified leadership succession policy?
  - a. If yes, please describe to the best of your ability what those policies are and what changes, if any, would you make to improve the current policy?
7. If you could craft a comprehensive leadership succession policy, where would you start? What would be the key principles? Please describe as many elements as you can.
8. In order for your vision of leadership succession to come to life, what elements of support would you require from the (governing body / head of school).
9. What leadership competencies are you searching for when you conduct a leadership search?

10. Please describe the relationship you have with the (board chair / head of school).

### **Limitations**

The main modes of data gathering in this qualitative multiple sample study are the individual semi-structured interview, policy document analysis, and demographic survey data. As such, limitations do exist, but on the main, these can be accounted for. The main disadvantage of qualitative research in general, semi-structured interviews in particular, is that findings cannot be extended to wider populations with the same degree of certainty that quantitative research might offer. Findings unique to the relatively few people included in the research study make it impossible to generalize across entire groups in varied situations. Nevertheless, as the intent of this study is to explore the nature and state of leadership succession planning and management by talking directly with individuals central to succession development decision-making, findings gathered in this study have significant value in their ability to point towards possible modes of action. There are several other issues, which may be evident during the data-gathering phase. These include, but are not limited to: issues of social desirability; the complexity of the study; the dependency on the researcher's ability to draw out rich detail from the interviews; the general lack of prior studies on this particular topic (this can be also seen as a strength of the study rather than a limitation); the statistical generalizability of the findings is highly dependent on n; and the researcher's access to study subjects.

### **Conclusion**

The genesis for this study comes from personal experience. Personal experiences can be potent and are perceived as having real consequences. However, in the world of academic research, personal experiences are nothing more than

interesting anecdotes. If there are lessons to be learned in studying leadership succession planning and management, they will only emerge in the operationalization of precise and careful research methods, bolstered by sound methodology. Effective leadership succession planning and management is situated at the confluence of three expanses of knowledge: Organizational Development (OD), sustainable leadership, and educational governance. I am confident that the findings produced in this study can inform future leaders on the organizational imperative to develop sound leadership succession plans in order to grow and sustain their respective organizations. The future of schooling is rapidly changing, and it is very likely the case that 50 or 100 years from now the act of school may be unrecognizable to us. Nevertheless, regardless of the formulation for schooling in the future, there will be a leadership structure of some form, and therefore leadership succession planning and development will be as important then as now.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

“More will be pursued than was volunteered. Less will be reported than was learned.” (Stake, 2000, p. 441)

### **Introduction**

The intent of this chapter is to organize and report the main findings of this multiple sample study using the presentation of relevant qualitative data. The data selections presented in this section represent the best examples of raw data gathered from all participants in this study. Excerpt used in this section are in the exact words of all participants and are presented in support of, or as an indication of an emerging theme. The findings are organized by research questions, with emergent themes nested within each relevant research question. The findings section is not simply an offering of raw study data left to the reader for interpretation and meaning-making. It is the hope of this researcher that meaning, if there is meaning to be made, is derived from the filtration of all findings through Event System Theory, which is the chosen theoretical model for this study. In this fashion, a narrative will emerge telling a story of leadership succession in international schools.

Chapter four comprises two main parts. Part one presents the structural underpinnings of the study. This begins with a brief summary of the study questions and emergent themes. Following that is a review of the methodology, sample school selection protocol, detail on data gathering, analysis procedures, and Event System Theory. Part two represents the findings presented by research question. Under each research question, emergent themes are presented and discussed.

### **Study questions and emergent themes**

Qualitative research questions are by design open and probative and must reflect the intent of the study. Qualitative research questions are exploratory in nature and are

designed to generate hypotheses that could be tested later in quantitative studies. It is a necessary condition that the questions are in accord with the chosen design (Simon, 2011). The questions, together with the approach, guide and structure the choice of data to be collected and analyzed. The purpose of this study is to determine recurring themes influencing the process of leadership succession in international schools. The following research questions assist to focus the study:

Q1. Within the boundaries of the three sample schools, what are the director and Board Chair person's perceptions and understandings of planning and management for director leadership succession events?

Q2. In what ways have past school leadership succession events been a disruptive influence in the life of the three sample schools, and what is the nature of the disruption?

Q3. In what ways are sample schools actively engaged in strategic succession planning, and what elements of that strategy, if any, have been effective?

There are eight promising themes indicating some form of potency to this study: Certain Change, Transition, Disruption, Internal Leadership Development, Necessary Conversations, Policymaking, Strategic Succession Planning and Management, and Deputy Director Appointment. Each of these themes emerged from the interview data with a frequency that indicated either all participants were thinking about it, or only a particular subset of participants were thinking about it. For example, Transition is a theme that only directors are talking about, whereas, Strategic succession planning and management is a theme common to all participants. Support for each theme will be presented in context



### **Review of methodology.**

Case (sample) study research examines “a contemporary phenomenon in depth and in its real-world context” (Yin, 2017, p. 237). Yin (1994) states, “when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 1), case (sample) study research is a comprehensive and appropriate method to investigate the “how” or “why” qualitative research questions. Depending on the context, multiple sample study research can provide greater confidence in findings generated from the overall study by way of triangulation, which improves the accuracy and completeness of the case study, strengthening the credibility of the research findings (Cronin, 2014; Yin, 2017).

The interview is the preferred method for data collection in phenomenological research (Bevan, 2014). Interviewing is the most widespread empirical research method across the human and social sciences (Brinkman, 2013). The benefit of using the interview method is that it resembles conversation with a consistent line of inquiry rather than fully structured probing (Yin, 2017, p. 110). Semi-structured streams of questions are fluid, but also reflective and responsive as the conversation ranges. The fundamental assumption when utilizing semi-structured interviewing as a primary research method is that the meaning subjects make of their own experiences affect the way in which they carry out those experience, which in turn is reflected in their explanation of those experiences. (Blumer, as cited in Seideman, 2013, p. 18). By utilizing the semi-structured interview, it is the hope of this researcher to tap into the feedback loop of participant’s understandings, perceptions, and experiences within their specific contexts.

The goal in choosing an appropriate methodology in qualitative research is to achieve data saturation, i.e., when the collection of new data does not shed any further

light on the issue under investigation (Mason, 2010). Interviews in general, semi-structured interviews in particular, are one such method by which to reach data saturation. Bernard (2012) stated that the number of interviews needed for a qualitative study to reach data saturation was a number he could not quantify, but the researcher takes what [they] can get. Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2013) suggest qualitative samples are subject to the law of diminishing returns; as the study goes on more data does not necessarily lead to more information. The occurrence of a piece of data, or a code, is all that is necessary to ensure that it becomes part of the analytical framework. The frequency of emergent themes is rarely important in qualitative research. The occurrence of one piece of noteworthy data has the potential to be as remarkable and as useful as several in understanding a topic. At its core, qualitative research is concerned with making meaning and not making generalized hypothesis statements (Mason, 2010). To that end, the participants in this multiple sample study are comprised of six high quality informants in three carefully selected schools.

### **Sample school selection and background.**

Before offering any details of the three sample schools in this study, it is important to remind the reader all data gathered in this study is considered sensitive and was provided in a relationship of trust with an assurance of confidentiality. All participants have the right to expect no information will be divulged without their permission. Furthermore, all information gathered in this study has been carefully vetted and cleansed of any identifying details, which may potentially identify sample schools or participants. School names have been changed using the NATO phonetic alphabet, and the names of participants have been expunged.

By way of review, the *most-similar* technique was used to select sample schools (Gerring & Cojocaru, 2016 p. 398). This technique is based on the premise that one can identify samples that exhibit strong similarities on background conditions (Z) but divergent outcomes (Y). The most-similar method relies on the identification of a small number of most-similar samples from a large population of potential samples based on matching algorithms that minimize differences on (Z) (Nielsen, 2016). According to Nielson (2016) most-similar sample selection follows a five-step progression: (1) defining the relevant universe of samples, (2) identifying key variables of interest that should be similar across the target samples, (3) identifying a variable or variables that should vary meaningfully across the target samples, and (4) selecting the desired number of samples, often a pair but sometimes more, that have the specified similarities and differences. (Nielsen, 2016, p. 571). Gerring and Cojocaru (2016) refer to the purposeful selection of cases (samples) as Algorithmic Case Selection (p. 411). Their algorithmic approach resembles Nielson's (2016) most-similar procedure for sample selection. Algorithmic sample selection follows a set procedure executed in sequence: define the research question, identify a sample of potential cases, identify and measure relevant variable of interest, construct a causal model (if required), apply a sorting algorithm, which may be mathematical (Herron & Kevin, 2016) to identify samples.

The complete algorithm for sample selection is detailed in chapter three under the heading sample selection. The result of the sample selection process was the identification of three schools with the most similar attributes. These three schools are identified in the table. The attributes indicating their similarities are geographic location, profit motivation, grade level, International Baccalaureate (IB) authorization, and Accreditation status.

A brief summary of basic details for each school reveals information regarding the number of students attending and the year the schools were opened. This information was not used as a criterion for inclusion since the year of inception or the population of the student body are not factors associated with school quality.

Table 6: Sample schools.

<u>School</u>	<u>Geographic location</u>	<u>Profit motivation</u>	<u>K-12</u>	<u>IB authorized</u>	<u>Accreditation</u>
Bravo International School (BIS)	Western Europe	Not-for-profit.	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> </ul>
Charlie International School (CIS)	Western Europe	Not-for-profit.	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> </ul>
Echo International School (EIS)	Western Europe	Not-for-profit.	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIS (Council of International Schools)</li> <li>• NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges).</li> </ul>

Bravo International School (BIS) was founded in the early 1960s. BIS serves over 1400 students representing 55 nationalities. The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) is offered in Grades 11 and 12, together with Advanced Placement courses. Charlie International School (CIS) was founded in 1967. CIS offers the IB Primary Years Programme (IBPYP), the IB Middle Years Programme (IBMYP) and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) to students 360 students from 35 nationalities. CIS is a three-programme school and is designated as a World School by the International Baccalaureate Organization. Echo International School (EIS) was founded in 1966 and is also considered an IB World School. EIS enrolls more than 1200 students comprising 65 nationalities. All three schools operate on purpose-built campuses and are fully accredited by both the Council of International Schools and the New England Association of Schools and

Colleges. Both accrediting bodies are global, independent, voluntary and non-profit membership organization. Accreditation demonstrates to the world that the school has achieved high standards of professional performance in international education and has a commitment to continuous improvement.

### **Review of data gathering and analysis procedures.**

The semi-structured interview is the primary method of data gathering. Six individuals in three schools were interviewed, three directors and three board chairpersons. Each participant was asked the same set of protocol questions. However, as this study is based on semi-structured interview methods, there was a natural ebb and flow to the conversations as respondents attended to specific questions from the protocol. Their responses were not limited or constrained in any way, and respondents were encouraged to answer each question in as much depth as they felt necessary. Each interview was between 55 and 60 minutes in length. The interviews were recorded by the interviewer and then transcribed by a professional third-party transcription service. All transcripts were checked for accuracy against the original audio recordings. Where discrepancies were noted between the transcription and the recordings, edits were made to reflect the full accuracy of the audio recordings. Once the transcripts were checked and treated for inconsistencies, the data was uploaded to Nvivo for analysis.

Nvivo is a qualitative data analysis computer software package produced by QSR International. Its primary purpose is to assist qualitative researchers working with rich text-based information. Nvivo is a powerful tool in the coding process by helping to sort and organize unstructured interview data into relevant themes. Once the data was coded, the software powerfully enabled the researcher to classify, sort and arrange information, and examine relationships in the data.

After transcription and upload, transcripts were reviewed several times, with each pass revealing new information and new themes. The very first review revealed *a priori* codes based on protocol questions. On subsequent reviews of transcripts, interesting information would be identified and coded. In total, 21 coded themes emerged from the data. As indicated earlier, the occurrence of one piece of noteworthy data has the potential to be as remarkable and as useful as several in understanding a topic of interest. Such was the case in coding this data. Of the 21 themes, seven emerged as indicating something of importance within the study.

### **Event System Theory.**

Finally, a brief review of the theoretical framework is required as an orientation for the reader before diving into the data. Event System Theory (EST) represents the necessary lens through which the rich data is brought into sharper focus. EST also provides the necessary vernacular by which to discuss the event of succession. Event strength, novelty, criticality, and disruption are the words used to make meaning of the anecdotal accounts and quotes from the participants. It is also good to remind the reader that a well-substantiated theory has within itself the power to explain and to meet the objectives of prediction and understanding of conditions and relationships among and between independent and dependent variables of interest. In this exploratory qualitative study, there are no independent or dependent variables to discuss, but there are certainly potent themes indicating that the understandings, perceptions, and ultimately, the decisions of participants are either influencing or influenced by the processes of leadership succession in international schools. With this in mind, a brief review of the theoretical framework used in this study is necessary to focus the attention of the reader as they consider the emergent themes and the data underpinning those themes. The theoretical framework for this

study is used to help make findings meaningful within the context in which they exist. A theoretical frame can also help establish an orderly connection between the gathered data and the prediction and anticipation of future events. For more detail on EST, it would be helpful for the reader to return to the EST discussion in Chapter Two of this dissertation. In short, EST draws from the deep vault of Open System Theory, then extends Open System Theory by providing an explanation of when, where and how events affect both the behavior and features of organizational entities, ultimately leading to subsequent events (Morgeson, Mitchell, & Liu, 2015, p. 515). Grusky (1960) reminds the reader that leadership succession “always leads to organizational instability and it is a phenomenon that all organizations must cope with” (p. 105). If Grusky’s comment were reframed in the EST vernacular, it might read leadership succession is the novel organizational event with disruptive strength and is critical in the nature of the response it elicits from the community. With Event System Theory acting as a lens through which to view the data, we can now look to the gathered interviews to see what those individuals with positional power are saying about leadership succession planning and management.

## **Findings**

### **Research Question One.**

The first study question is the first of three for reasons of logic. Asking participants to state their understandings and perceptions of leadership succession in the organizations they lead is a method of centering their thoughts and asking participants to articulate as succinctly as possible their views of leadership succession.

*Question 1: Within the boundaries of the three sample schools, what are the Head of School and Board Chair person’s perceptions and understandings of leadership succession planning and management?*

This initial question provides a natural segue to primary concerns associated with leadership succession. The first three responses reflect the views of the board chairs; the next three are those of the school directors.

### **Board Chairperson's understanding of succession**

The board chair at Bravo International School (BIS) offered his appraisal of leadership succession and categorized it as a constant process in the life of an international school. He states,

“First, leadership succession is a process. It is and should be, in a sense a constant so that the director is always thinking about succession. The board is always thinking about succession. The director is thinking about succession for his own team, and he knows who, whether it's a current member of his team or someone else out in the universe, could step in for his roles. The board is regularly thinking about and discussing succession for the director. And the board, the governance committee is regularly thinking about succession for the board chair. So, it's in my mind and should be a fairly rigorous, and fairly constant process.”

It is apparent in this response that this chair is focused on the natural ebb and flow of leadership succession. His response is “board-centric” suggesting succession is an issue to be decided and managed at the governing body level. This response is coherent with Event System Theory in that disruptive events within an organization, such as a leadership succession, will affect various levels of the organization unequally. The governing body will view the event differently than the parent community or the faculty.

The board chair at Charlie International School (CIS) seems to understand the question differently than the chair at BIS. The initial response to the same question



from the chair at CIS focused on the necessary leadership skills and characteristics of the succeeding leader. He states,

“I think there are several aspects to it. In terms of designing what kind of leader you want in the first place is a good place to start for me. So, what are the issues that need to be addressed? In our context, there were quite considerable issues that needed to be addressed, and therefore that will determine the kind of leader you want to have coming in, the kind of leader you're looking for.”

From this comment, it is evident this chair is primarily focused on the question of who should succeed, and the characteristics of the next leader, not on the constant nature of succession. When asked to consider the process of succession and the fact that at some future point there will be a leadership succession, the board chair continued with,

“We're looking actually five to ten years ahead, right now. That's what the board is doing, together with the head. Everything we're setting up today is in that direction. But looking for the successor, we are acutely aware that we will have a succession, and that ... I was going to say (the current director X) will be hard to replace. However, the person we bring in will not be another X, because there's only one of him, but the things that will need to be done at that time will be different because the school will have changed, as will the (school) environment. We're not operating in a vacuum.”

These comments are reinforced later in the conversation when the board chair provides elements of concern related to past, present, and future succession. From his response it appears that this chair is aware of the nature of succession, but that identifying the right next leader is a key component of leadership succession.

The third board chair at Echo International School (EIS) reiterates some of the comments of the chair at BIS with respect to the concerns of the governing body. However, the chair's response stands out as being far more comprehensive in nature. That is, this chair provides a more detailed understanding of leadership succession than the chair's counterparts at BIS or CIS. On understandings of leadership succession and the inevitability of it, the chair initially indicates,

“It's the change of the school leader or the school director. In the school's governance structure, the people who manage that are the board of directors, in particular the Chair. If there is an occasion where leadership needs to change, then the board manages that process by conducting a search process, and appointing the leadership.”

Within the same response, the chair goes on to state several questions that must be attended to when considering strategic succession planning and management,

“Do you search internally, or do you search externally? What are pros and cons of that? Do we have systems in place to groom the next generation of potential leaders in the school? My view of that is because most administrative systems in international schools do not have much depth, therefore, your ability to groom a successor from within the school is actually quite limited. Also, because of the way accreditation demands that the head of the school has complete and full power over most aspects of the school, therefore that power is rarely delegated to other people. I think, typically, it's hard to find a successor from within the school.”

The element of timing and when to initiate the process of strategic replacement of the current head of school emerges. The EIS chair's comment here suggests a particularly challenging component of strategic management.

“Another aspect of succession I would think about is even when you have a head of school in place, preparing for the eventual change of that leader. How early do you start that process or how do you think about the longevity of your existing leader? In the school's governance structure, the people who manage that are the board of directors, in particular the Chair. If there is an occasion where leadership needs to change, then the board manages that process by conducting a search process, and appointing the leadership. At some point the question must be asked whether this person continues to be the best person to lead the school?”

It is evident that this board chair is thinking about all three possibilities leading to leadership succession; everyone will leave at some point in time. Some will leave willingly, some leave unwillingly, and some die. The question is fundamental to good school governance and every governing body will wrestle with these questions.

#### School Director's understanding of succession

In this section, the same question about understanding and perception of leadership succession was presented to the three individuals occupying the director positions. Their responses are presented below.

The answer to the question from the director at Charlie International School is perhaps the most surprising response. When asked about his understanding, he replied,

“What do I know about it? Actually, I don't know anything about it.” I think it's just what I think is right or wrong from my own experience, from my own attitudes that I have, and from my kind of values.”

This was a simple, straightforward, and very honest answer about his knowledge of leadership succession. Nevertheless, it is evident from the balance of the interview

that this director holds a more sophisticated understanding of leadership succession planning and management than his initial response might suggest. Given the fact that the interview had been scheduled for weeks in advance, and the director and this interviewer had been engaged in a conversation prior to the start of the formal interview, it is curious that this would be his opening remark about succession when asked about his understanding. However, he qualified his initial response with a more detailed understanding of leadership succession focused on a primary concern for the welfare of his community. He indicates,

“I've seen lots of leadership changes in international schools because I follow with this interest. Many leaders leave without thinking twice about what's left behind in a school afterward. It could be personal reasons. It could be career reasons. It could be monetary reasons, in many cases, but I find it quite surprising how often it's really for just their private reasons and not for the reason of doing something right for those kids in that school. If leadership succession comes, it is done in a way that the head of school just leaves because another good opportunity has come up, which I think is pretty wrong. The other experience I've seen as well is that certain boards make very ad hoc decisions in letting go of heads and doing it on such a quick note, which comes very often from a corporate background, from people with the hire and fire kind of mentality, that they don't look at what happens once that head has left. Have you got the right replacement in place already or are you just so annoyed with that person that you don't care what the consequences are for the entire community? Whatever I do, it doesn't matter whether it's leadership or not, I always have priorities. First of all, we have to think about the students, whether this impacts their learning or not. Second, you have to think about your staff.”

It is evident from this response that leadership succession is a complex decision that requires the contemplation of several factors, not the least of which is the wellbeing of the people in the organization.

When asked about his understanding about leadership succession, the director at Bravo International School offers a view of succession that begins with the initial decision to change schools. For him, the initial decision is the beginning of the process. What comes after the initial decision is the critical elements which define the qualitative success or failure of the succession. This director views succession as a series of transitions as a lived experience. He states,

“I think leadership succession actually begins with the decision to jump into the fray of a job search and a commitment to moving to another international school headship or director role in a different part of the world that could have radically different expectations around success than what is being expected of you in your capacity. I think a lot of times people jump into leadership transition maybe without truly spending the time to be totally aware of all the facets that come with it. When I say facets, I'm talking about the pre-transition phase, the transition phase while you're living it, and especially the post transition phase. You need to have a clear understanding of how that journey is going to look as an individual.”

He summarizes his understanding of leadership succession succinctly as the priority of the organization in general, and the Human Resource department specifically. He further indicates,

“Succession needs to be a priority for the organization and something they want to do really, really well. If your HR (department) isn't strong and those services aren't being there, chances are you're not going to do it right or you're going to

make mistakes. The first thing I always look for in a school is the depth and breadth in services that are being provided in the HR program. It tells me a lot about the values of the organization. If you have a school that's focused, if you want an organization that's truly focused on people, you better be providing the depth and breadth of services to help them in succession transition. You've only got one shot at first impressions. You might as well go out of your way to try to do it right but it better be in a way that you can sustain and continue to back up over time.”

It is evident from his statement, and further statements later in the interview, that this director defines succession as a series of transitions. It is an interesting aspect of this study that the theme of transition appears to be one-sided, that is, only the directors appear to be concerned with this element of succession. The theme of transition will be considered more deeply further on in the findings section. Suffice it to say at this juncture that transition is a significant component of succession from the director's side.

This director at Echo International School characterizes the state of leadership succession in international schools as a general lack of strategic planning for succession. As a result, there is a troubling lack of definition for the role of director. He states,

“I guess one of the things I would say is that probably in my experience it's something that hasn't been terribly well planned for, to the degree that I've even encountered situations where schools don't have a formal job description for the head of school, so it's hard to fill a position when you don't even know exactly what the parameters of the job are.”

He continues by providing more information related to his initial statement on adequately defining the role of the director but takes a position on debate related to the outside versus inside successor. He specifies,

“I think one piece of it is schools actually defining what is it they expect a head of school to do, and then beyond defining what the job is, deciding what are the best qualities to fill that, and then looking long term at how are you (school leadership) ensuring that you're cultivating people who can fill those positions. I think that there's a bit of a bias out there that many schools think it's always best to look outside the institution. I think there's a lot of value in teachers getting out of their school and seeing how other people do things and seeing how other systems work. I think sometimes that's also interpreted to mean that it's best to bring in a head of school who's going to come in with a lot of external experience.”

The inside versus outside successor debate is an interesting and pertinent topic of discussion as it relates to the qualities of a prospective school leader. However, while this particular theme is an important consideration, this researcher stops short of a full dissection and analysis of the insider/outsider issue as it is beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it to say that the insider/outsider successor argument as it pertains to the international school context is an area of study that deserves further research.

The next section in the findings section deals with the primary concerns of both directors and board chairpersons relating to leadership succession. It is important to state that comments made under this heading are not in response to a specific protocol question, but rather are the result of the semi-structured nature of the interview in general. It would be correct to call *primary concerns* an important emergent code as all participants seemed to have something to say about their

concerns for leadership succession within their specific contexts. However, while there seems to be a consensus that leadership succession is concerning, the concerns of the directors appear to differ from the primary concerns of the chair persons, and they focus on the event at different levels.

#### Primary concerns of Board Chairs:

One of the major themes here relates to the timing of succession, or rather, the untimeliness of it. The board chair at CIS offers an anecdote related to their recent director succession event that was not timed to coincide with the usual rhythm of succession, which typically follows the academic calendar of the school. It is typical that leadership will transition at the end of an academic school year. In this particular event, there is an announcement to the general school community that current director will be leaving at the end of the school year. However, the incoming director has made an arrangement with his current school to stay on in his role until the end of December, which is well into the next academic year, leaving a leadership void for a period of about 5 months.

This unanticipated gap in leadership presented the CIS governing body with a problem. The succession event, in this case, would not be as seamless as was hoped and it generated a significant amount of anxiety for the community. The board chair goes on to describe the unsettled emotional environment of the stakeholder community during this unusual transition, resulting in what appeared to be a steady stream of informal parent meetings demanding information and action. He said,

“The board members were constantly getting blasted by hundreds of parents about different things and being pulled aside in small groups in the playground and all of those kinds of things. That's the environment into which walks in your head.”



There was an immediate understanding that an interim director would need to be installed to manage the day-to-day administration of the school. When asked about the community's reaction to the news of the leadership succession announcement, and the unusual timing, the CIS board chair put it very succinctly, "It was a crisis. Nobody said it was a crisis, but that's what it was."

The last sentence in his comment is the most interesting in his statement. The new director was assuming the leadership of a school in turmoil. In spite of the excellent work the interim director did to manage the school for a period of time, the strength of the event was such that the community became agitated. It is important to note that the timing of the leadership succession was not entirely responsible for the general concern of CIS stakeholders. The timing of the leadership succession event only exacerbated an already a concerned community. The CIS board chair indicated that community concerns were only heightened when the announcement of the succession event was public. When the chair suggests there is an "environment" the director is walking into, what he is referring to is an overall concern about the health of the school. He goes on to explain,

" CIS had a succession of short-term leaders over a period of four or five years. Three, I believe, in that five or six-year period. That came on the back of succeeding an individual who had been running the school for probably about a 20-year period. The changes in leadership coincided with a substantial drop in pupil numbers, which came about as a result of the recession starting in 2008, the crisis 2008, which resulted in very large numbers of expatriates that formed the majority of the school being repatriated."

This statement provided valuable and important context by which to understand both the economic factors and the community stakeholder's perceptions of these factors.

The board chair's following comments provide more detail about issues facing the incoming director. He indicates,

“Okay, so what are the issues that the new head has to deal with?” When you really look, what are the problems? ...low pupil numbers, which directly relates into cash and the ability to manage the school and deliver the services that make sense for the school. Secondly, with that, and by the way, with all of the anxiety that goes on, and this is of course what differentiates a school from a commercial organization, is that while there's a lot of emotion in companies and around people and so on, in a school it's compounded because of the pupils who are not just customers, but they are emotionally bound to the payers at a level of emotion which is unparalleled in any other circumstances, an interest which goes beyond the traditional commercial interest. This is the highest level of emotion between parent and child that there is. There is nothing more than that. So that puts a different emphasis onto a school compared to a commercial organization, which you also have to manage. You can manage the business, but you also have to manage that emotional level. The reason I'm bringing that up is that with all the trauma and anxiety about the school and falling numbers and the relatively poor leadership and so on, that creates an enormous amount of emotion, which manifests itself in a huge amount of rumors and concerns, which automatically is voiced to whoever is prepared to listen that might be in a position to change something.”

From this description, it is evident that timing is critical in a leadership succession. It is also the case there are forces beyond the control of the school, such as the health of a global economy. Given the nature of many international schools serving a globalized transient workforce, a generalized global economic crisis will

have a sharp and immediate effect on enrollment. This leads to uncertainty. A globalized economic crisis affecting enrolment, a leadership succession event, and a void in leadership at the directorship level for an extended period of time and the event strength resembles a perfect storm of the worst possible conditions.

In contrast, the concerns related to the succession of the board chair at Bravo International School were focused on issues at a completely different level. At BIS, the board chair's concerns about succession planning and management revolved around issues of a much longer-term nature. There are two issues that surfaced during the interview: The first is how to manage unexpected succession events, and the second is a need for long-term planning for building executive leadership capacity within the pool of existing staff. An interesting theme was the identification of potential director candidates external to the organization, and prior to any succession events. This theme was indicating an awareness of the need to anticipate and manage succession events before they occur.

It is apparent that the BIS board chair has given the possibility of an unexpected succession event careful consideration. When questioned about the possibility of a sudden and unexpected event in which the current director is incapacitated or is unavailable, he provides an interesting analysis of how the school should be identifying internal candidates who would be available to take over the leadership of the school with very short notice. In this excerpt, the chair suggests a step by step strategy to building a leadership "pipeline" or "bench strength." He suggests,

"I think that number one is, which names are in the frame? In the hit-by-the-bus case, or win-the-lottery case, who would step in, who could fill the role right now basically, if this were to happen? Second, who could fill this role in the 18 to 36-month time frame? And there may be a couple of names in that box for

different roles. So, the first question I think is simply around names in the frame. Second question is about digging into that second box and saying what needs to happen in order for these people to be ready to fill that role in one, two, or three years. And then of course logically following that, what do we need to do, what does the director need to do, what resources or opportunities do we have to provide to make sure that development opportunity are present? And then of course, there's another conversation that falls logically from that, what if there are no names?"

Nevertheless, this chair is comforted by the fact that there is someone who currently holds the role of the deputy who would take over school leadership in the event of an emergency. He states,

"At the director level, it's clear to us that in an emergency situation, that we would turn to the deputy director to step in for a period of time while we conducted a search." However, there is an interesting aspect regarding the possibility of appointing the deputy director. He further states, "The deputy director was considered for the role of director in the last director search. He didn't get the job, but he agreed to stay on as number two which was fantastic for us as it gives us that additional bit of security."

This comment stands out for two reasons: First, it indicates the school has a deputy head of school position in place. The chair's comment about the added security the deputy brings is critical as it speaks to a specific element of strategic succession management and planning. However, the second reason relates to the fact that the deputy director was considered for the role of director, was ultimately passed over, but agreed to stay on in the role as deputy. Unfortunately, more was not offered on this interesting element, and it was not pursued during the interview.

In reference to the strategic aspect of succession planning, the board chair offers an interesting view of one of his roles as board chair. With respect to the concept of building bench strength, he suggests a desire to initiate an informal search of potential candidates who might be a good fit for the directorship of the school. He is not referring to active head hunting but does express an awareness in surveying the international school landscape for available talent and curating an “external bench” of candidates, not in the same fashion as developing an internal bench, but as a form of head hunting. The succession management strategy described by this board chair is anticipatory and forward thinking. He suggests,

“There's another piece, which is identifying candidates outside the school who we would like to hire. So, for instance, I would like to know who are the three best directors for this school anywhere in the world... I mean specifically for this context. Who would those three be, because I think that I should know them. For example, when I travel to London, I should have lunch with some great director or deputy director at some great private school in London who we (the board) might be interested in hiring someday. My view of the bench is that there's an internal and an external bench that I should be keeping an eye on.”

The board chair at Echo International School was concerned with a different set of questions than her counterparts at BIS and CIS. The questions of concern for this chair resonate with strategic decision-making. With respect to whom to look for, the chair indicates,

“What are we looking for? What does the school need? Who is already there? What is the ideal candidate look like? Do you search internally, or do you search externally? What are pros and cons of that? Do we have systems in place

to groom the next generation of potential leaders in the school? Obviously, you're never going to have the ideal candidate walk up to you and apply.”

The chair further offers her rationale for favoring an external search over an internal search.

“Most administrative systems in international schools do not have much depth, therefore, your ability to groom a successor from within the school is actually quite limited. Also, because of the way accreditation demands that the head of the school has complete and full power over most aspects of the school, that power is rarely delegated to other people. I think, typically, it's hard to find a successor from within the school. International education is changing very quickly, and you can get best practice from other people when they come to you externally. New impetus, new ideas, that's always good.”

Primary concerns of Directors:

The primary concern of the three directors is the theme is the theme related to transition. This theme has a very wide range. There is an interesting duality at play in this theme; for every director accepting a leadership offer and making arrangements to transition into a new school, there is a second director who is winding up their position and preparing to transition out. Transition can be understood as the one-side process of onboarding a new leader, from the offer of employment through to the first day of work and beyond. The time frame on a transition such as this can easily span time frames up to 18 months, and some cases even longer. It is not uncommon to view the first number of days or months in the tenure of a new leader as a transitional time frame where the only expectation of a new leader is to watch, listen, and learn. Event System Theory readily reinforces the element of time as a disruptive force. The

strength of the succession event is either moderated or exacerbated the event level, and/or the event time frame.

Most international schools are proficient at the administrative basics of hiring new leaders, but this is only the beginning and, in fact, the easiest part of the process. Committing to a new leader does little to prevent possible problems that may rise when these new directors assume their new roles and begin working with new colleagues and grappling with unfamiliar cultural norms and expectations. This section will provide significant insight into how directors view leadership transition, and how they perceive the process both as primary actors within the process and as they understand transitions from their leadership perspective. Each director has a unique perspective of transition, which is informed by their own personal experiences.

The director at BIS holds the position that beginnings and endings are not mutually exclusive and that the qualitative nature of the leader's exit from their former school may set the stage for the quality of their subsequent entrance to their new school. He advises,

“You really need to go out of your way and make sure that you leave well. I go by a saying, in international education given the mobility of educators, largely how well you start in a new place is determined by how well you've left your previous. You want to go overboard and have people say to you I've never seen somebody work so hard up until the very last day even though they knew they were leaving. Then you know you've fulfilled that transition responsibility in a way that's best for the organization and best for you individually as you move on.”

He further states that long transition periods pose a challenge to the newly appointed leader given the increasing time frames of these transitions.

“Transition can be a bit awkward. A lot of international school directors now are having to announce 18 to 24 months ahead of time that they're looking and they're going to be leaving. For example, when I came to this school I had an 18-month window where I was already hired here but I had to finish gracefully at my previous post.”

In spite of long transition periods, the BIS director felt that the lengthy period of transition presented an opportunity for the new leader to engage with the new school community.

“When I transitioned from my previous school to this school because I had 18 months I was able to visit three times for a week at a time. During those weeks I would visit with parents, companies, politicians, key stakeholders in the school so that when I came in they already knew who I was.”

During the 18-month transition (in advance of arrival) window this director was remotely involved in regular meetings with the transition committee at the receiving school. As one might expect, these meetings, and the attending decision making would be over and above the director's current work load.

“The other thing the school did, for example, is we met once a month with the transition committee and we would talk about the school, about transition things, about what was happening. That involved good and bad conversations, or painful conversations, of things that maybe weren't going so well here. Again, the purpose of all that wasn't for me to pass judgment. It was for me to begin to develop thematic ideas or plans of where the issues were here that I was going to inherit if that makes sense.”

This director appears to have a wide view of succession. For this director, succession involves the entire school community, including the exiting leader. He also alludes to



the importance of transparency, which would include details about who is responsible for aspects of the transition. He indicates,

“It's not just succession of the new person. It's the succession of the person leaving. It's the involvement of the community. I think a...number of times schools make a mistake. They bring somebody in and they actually haven't set them up well for success. I think a succession plan, a core driver in that is everything we do must set the new person up for success. I think there must be clarity around who's going to do what. I'll just summarize that by saying I think the transition succession plan really needs to be carefully written and thought out so it involves a wide variety of people and plays to the strengths of the current director, the new one coming in, and involves the board around clarity of expectations.”

A final concern for this director revolves around the transparency of the search process. He alludes to instances of schools “fast-tracking” their search by appointing a new director with going through a fully transparent, community-based recruitment process. Reasons for such a decision may be related to issues of pragmatism, but this director is concerned that by skipping a proper recruitment process, schools are jeopardizing the potential success of the incoming leader.

“For example, some schools won't do a search. They decide on a recruitment process but they won't do a search. They're just going to appoint somebody. A number of schools are actually picking up the phone and saying, ‘how long are you going to stay at your current international school? We're going to have an opening in 2019 - 2020. Are you interested? We'll fly you out. If everybody likes you, we won't even do a search.’ People are actually becoming that aggressive. I don't think that sets up a candidate for a successful transition

because you don't have the credibility of a search, or three or four people coming in to meet the community”

For the director at Echo International School, concerns related to his transition were greatly mediated having held the position of deputy director at the same school prior to accepting the directorship.

“I can say that my first year as head of school after having been deputy head of school was far, far smoother than I think it could have possibly been if I'd come from the external. I already had relationships in place, people who already had some idea of who I was and what to expect from me, and so I didn't have to go through that initial storming and norming phase with people constantly jockeying for position. I think that even if they hadn't chosen me to be the head of school, I think my presence as the deputy head of school would also have facilitated a smoother transition for whoever came in because there would have been somebody in second position who I think people knew and trusted and could help maintain certain developments that were happening. I think that gave people a lot of confidence.”

It is clear from this director's comments the potential for a disruptive transition was significantly minimized as a result of having been deputy director. The potential for school community disruption as a result of leadership succession is a theme that all three directors speak about in some form, but this director, in particular, is very clear about the positive regulating effect of a deputy director on an already anxious school community. He indicates,

“The stories that I've heard about the history of the school is that every time there's been a change of head of school, the school's gone through a mini-crisis while everybody tried to figure out who is this person, what do they stand for,

and what are they going to do. When I became head of school, I'd gotten a lot of feedback that teachers didn't feel like that happened. That it was very different because they knew me. It wasn't just that they chose me and I'd been the deputy head, I think having a deputy head is a kind of guarantor of a certain amount of continuity. In part, I would say it was because the person who became the head of school happened to already be somebody within the school, but I would also say that having that second position just made everybody a little calmer about it. Even if the person whom they had chosen as head were completely unknown, I think they would see the continuity of the deputy head as being something to help hold things steady.”

The director at Charlie International School echoes the director of Bravo International School on many of the same transitional sentiments. His view on the qualities of a positive transition is that the current leader is an integral component of a successful leadership succession by simply ensuring all the loose ends are tied up and making sure the new leader is not inheriting a confusing mess.

“I think one of the very basic things for a good leadership succession for me is that there is trust upfront between the parties that are involved in the succession planning. The current leader is always a part of the succession planning because he or she has to pave the way for the next person transitioning in because if you leave a mess then transitioning in is a catastrophe for the next person.”

The director offered his perspective as an outgoing director after he had announced his resignation from his previous school. For this director, after his announcement, he received a significant amount of positive feedback from the school community he was due to leave. He had been the director of the school for five and a half years. He was

instrumental in stabilizing a very new school and had presided over the school as it grew quickly. The director states,

“I was very, very surprised as well after I made my announcement that I was leaving, because this was kind of best time for me. I got so much positive feedback about my time in the school. The community reaching out to me and giving me such positive feedback was really a nice experience for me.”

This director’s transition was unusual in its timing. He had made a decision to leave his former school as early as possible. However, given the timing of his decision to leave and his simultaneous appointment to his new school, which was in May, he decided to stay on as director for the first semester of the following academic year. Naturally, this decision created a problem for the receiving school as they were losing their director at the end of the academic year. He indicates,

“My intention was to leave mid-year so that I’m there as of the first of January. But because of that, the school here (the receiving school) put an interim head in place for half a year. It was a very experienced, very senior director, with whom I communicated with the whole way through the first half year.

This comment is interesting for two reasons: The first is that this leader was prepared to delay his departure from his previous school in the interest of leadership continuity. Second, as a result of the delay in transition, interim leadership was installed during this period in order to provide leadership coverage between directors. International interim leadership at the director level is topic that requires further study. Given the predicted growth rate of the international school market over the next decade, there is valid reason to anticipate an increase in the use of interim director leadership as international schools struggle to find directors. It is beyond the scope of

this study to consider the nature and implications of interim leadership in international schools. This is definitely an area of study that requires further development.

Similar to the director at BIS, this director made himself available to his new school before officially taking over his fulltime duties. In addition to taking meetings remotely, he traveled to the new school periodically to be present and to be visible to the new community. He indicates,

“I came up to here twice during that time to be in important meetings. For example, the AGM of the board association and I flew up once, as well, to attend one of the (sports) tournaments just to have contact with the kids and to show myself as well in a way, so that the community starts to know me.”

Interestingly, this director alluded to the two sides of his transition. The first was his initiation into the school community as a candidate for the role, which included his introduction to the community. He spoke positively of his introduction to the wider community composed of parents, students, and the governing body, but was clearly not impressed with his introduction to the two principals with whom he would be working very closely. The second element of his transition was with regards to his family. It is evident from his comment that his family’s transitional experience was very important to him as well as his. He indicates,

“I had the feeling in the beginning that my two principals didn't want me. I remember the tour they gave to me when I interviewed here, it was appalling. In fact, I told them “it was appalling what you did to me at that time.” On the other hand, the board provided even more support. They took care of my wife, and really nurtured her and invited her, and made sure that our private circumstances were working out very well. I was very appreciative of that as well. You must look at the private dimension of the succession as well as the professional.”

These final comments signal an element of transition that moves beyond the professional transition of a director. The leadership succession of a professional director is far more than the simple exchange of one leader for another. There must be an understanding that the family members of a transitioning director are as significantly affected by the succession as the director themselves. A director has a professional duty to the school community and will endeavor to do their best as they move into a new role. However, the invisible weight of family in transition is riding on the shoulders of that leader as well as the concerns of a new school family. In the case of a transitioning family, the details matter; get those right, and the school lifts the weight off the shoulders of their new director. As the director stated above, “You must look at the private dimension of the succession as well as the professional.”

### **Research Question Two.**

#### **Disruptive nature of leadership succession**

Grusky (1960) was the first to suggest that leadership succession “always leads to organizational instability and it is a phenomenon that all organizations must cope with” (p. 105). Organizational disruption was a major theme that emerged during the interviews. However, on close inspection, it is evident that disruption can be categorized into two sub-themes: disruption as experienced by the various community stakeholders, and disruption as a major factor in stalled school improvement initiatives. School improvement initiatives can be best understood through the organizational development lens. The modern field of school improvement has a long history and dates back to the development of Organizational Development (OD) and the social psychological writings and practice of Kurt Lewin (1947). The fundamental thesis of his work in this area is on the influence of the

organization on the behavior of its members (Hopkins, Stringfield, Harris, Stoll, & Mackay, 2014).

*Q2. In what ways has past international school leadership succession been a disruptive influence in the life of the three sample schools?*

In this section, interview comments are not divided by participant roles, such as director or board chair. Comments related to disruption are organized based on the two sub-themes: disruption as experienced by the various community stakeholders, and disruption as a major factor in stalled school improvement initiatives. If Grusky's proposition on the disruptive nature of leadership succession frames the image of succession as a disruptor, then Event System Theory delivers the color and the shading to complete the image. The following interview comments act as supporting detail and help to bring the image to life.

The first sub-theme about community concerns related to succession is clearly stated by the participants. After accepting the position of director at Charlie International School, the director was faced with a barrage of questions and concerns from the new community about the future, namely his future. He states,

"I found as well that the community was clearly worried about who's the next one coming in and lots of these questions came towards me and I tried to hopefully manage that in a way that I took away the worries from them as well."

Interestingly, when he states "who's the next one" he is referring to his successor. It is evident the community is wondering out loud about the longevity of this new director, but for good reason. He goes on to indicate,

"The running joke of this school is, "How long will this one last?" Before me was a head of school who was here for 21 years and left in 2004 or 5, something like that, he is the legend here. They were golden times. They had no problems

with student numbers, industry was all around, they had to turn away students. The classic international school setting of those days. Then this guy retired and then they had, I think, until I came in 2015, about 10 years, I think they had about six or seven heads in that time. Nobody lasted here. That was what completely broke down morale. In 2009, they had this big, major crisis as well, and that head at that time, I think he was a good head, didn't survive because he had to let go of so many people that trust was broken here in the school as well. Since then no one has lasted long. So many procedures have been lost over ten years. So many structures of the school had been lost because of all those transition.”

It is very evident from this comment the series of successions with a decade time frame had taken its toll on the community. The board chair at CIS echoed the comments of the director and went as far as to call it trauma. He states,

“With all the trauma and anxiety about the school and falling numbers and the relatively poor leadership and so on, that creates an enormous amount of emotion, which manifests itself in a huge amount of rumors and concerns, automatically voiced to whoever is prepared to listen that might be in a position to change something.”

Taking a different approach to the same theme, the board chair at Bravo International School provided a comment on the disruptive nature of succession events within the board. He is speaking about the unexpected and very messy departure of the board chair after an awkward and unprofessional interaction with a parent. He states,

“The whole departure of the chair was surrounded by controversy as you can imagine and I think as a board we never had perfect clarity on how different



segments of the parent community were interpreting events and how big those different segments were. We didn't know, is this a group of two, three, five families or is this 25% of this? We had no idea, right? And it was difficult to get a reliable sense of that even just happening around the board. So anyway, teachers start feeling antsy. People start worrying about, well if parents can somehow force out a board chair, can't they force out the director? What's next? Who's next?"

As one can well imagine, this event reverberated through the entire organization. The director at the same school provided a corroborating comment, but it is clear from his comment he is concerned about the impact of the event on school improvement initiatives, possibly for better or worse, He indicates,

"For example, the succession of a new board chair. An old board chair leaving and a new board chair coming in can be radically disruptive to a school community and to the current director because now you're responsible, or you're participating in the succession of this new individual that maybe has a huge impact on the future of the school moving forward."

Form this comment it is clear the disruption of leadership succession can easily affect the governing body. The event strength on the community of these anecdotes was particularly acute, even though the person being directly affected was the board chair. From previous comments, it would be easy to conclude that a community reaction of this magnitude would be anticipated if the person unexpectedly departing was the school director. However, in this case, even the succession of a board chair, a role largely in the background, has the potential to disrupt.

On the topic of governing body succession, the school director at EIS suggests that continuity on the governing body does have an impact on the perceptions of the school community. He indicates,

“Research shows that when you have at least a portion of the board who's in place for a longer period of time, they're much more likely to stick with the same head of school for a longer period of time, and that this continuity of both the board and the director benefits the school and the community.”

The board chair at EIS offers a different response to the questions of school stability and disruption. This board chair is a 12-year member of the school community. The chair started their affiliation with the school as a parent, then as member of the governing body, and ultimately as board chair. It is not overstating the fact that this chair holds sufficient institution memory to recall enough history to provide some commentary. With respect to school improvement, the chair holds the position that people make the difference. The chair indicates,

“Six years ago, when I first joined the board, and when I compare it to what the school is today, it's the leadership, and who the leader is can make such a vast difference to how the school's performing. I'd like for this to grow and sustain itself, but I realize it's very dependent on people, so the board absolutely needs to be thinking of, "Who do we want to bring onto the board next? How do they fit in? Do they buy into our mission?" Because I've seen, in the past, how having the wrong constellation of people can be so destabilizing, and just leap to wars between the board, within the board, and with the head of school, and it's really bad for the school when you have that poisonous atmosphere”.

The second sub-theme under the disruption umbrella is a factor related to the effects of leadership succession on school improvement initiatives. Leadership is commonly regarded as a key factor in accounting for differences in the success with which schools foster the learning of their students (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Event System Theory reinforces the fact that succession is generally disruptive and the event can have sufficient strength to derail any school improvement initiatives. The following excerpts provide evidence of a possible link.

When asked about a possible link between leadership succession and stalled school improvement he had this to say,

“Obviously a new person can come in and say I'm not aligned with that philosophy. The board can say we have never really been a fan of that program and this school improvement initiative anyway and you need to change it or we don't have the funds or resources to continue to support it.”

His statement suggests the possibility of dampened school improvement initiatives but does not go all the way to suggest there is a direct link. He qualifies his statement further,

“I really worry that in succession planning if schools are allowing that to be an excuse to not stay ahead of the conversation, then they're putting an unreliable amount of expectation on either one individual or individuals. That's why the whole generative piece in board governance to me is so important, where the board is actually involved in generative thinking with the school's leadership team on the direction of the school through projects or ad hoc type of groups. That way there's common understanding and vision of what it is we're trying to nurture and develop and/or create. In the absence of that, yeah, I think succession planning could be a barrier to program initiatives.”

The director at EIS supports the comments of the director at BIS when he states,

“We've seen as a school before the damage that a chair can do if he or she is not aligned with the philosophy and vision of the school. Or somebody who takes on the job for the wrong reason. The school has suffered some very difficult times when the chair was not the right person.”

He also goes on to suggest that stability and certain longevity within the directorship might be a reasoned approach to maintaining forward momentum on school improvement initiatives. He indicates,

“The board did some homework and they looked at the history of the school, and they looked at ... we're 50 years old ... and they were able to look back and look at times when the school did well and times when the school struggled. I would say if there was a golden era of the school, it was when there was one particular head who was there for 10 1/2 years.”

### **Research Question Three.**

*Q3. In what ways are sample schools actively engaged in strategic succession planning, and what elements of that strategy, if any, have been effective?*

The final research question investigates the extent to which sample schools are actively planning for and managing leadership succession. The theme of this section is titled strategic succession planning and management. Before any strategic succession planning and management can occur, there necessarily needs to be an understanding of strategic succession planning and management and a desire to plan in anticipation of succession. The board chair at CIS states,

“We're looking actually five to ten years ahead, right now. That's what the board is doing, together with the head. Everything we're setting up today is in that

direction. But looking for the successor, we are acutely aware that we will have a succession.”

In response to the question asking if leadership succession could be managed better, the director at CIS responds,

“Absolutely. I'm sure it can be managed better, but it can only be managed before the leadership succession comes along.”

In anticipating and managing succession, governing bodies are facing a critical time constraint in their strategic outlook. Searches lasting more than a year are quickly becoming the rule rather than the exception. Furthermore, the increasing complexity of the search is forcing schools to conduct multiple searches. The director at BIS indicates.

“The really top international schools are really casting careful searches.

They're trying to lock their top candidate up ... 18 to 24 months in advance and they're okay with that. A lot of schools are actually even engaging in interim leadership people if the right candidate doesn't present themselves. I know a number of schools that have gone two, three different searches. Frustrated after the first one, they didn't get who they wanted. Did it again, didn't get what they wanted. They decided to go the interim route and they're going to open up the search for a third time.”

When pressed for a possible reason for the increased complexity and ever-increasing search time frames, he stated,

“There's a shortage of really... experienced international educators for these roles. Just like with great teachers, everybody's looking for the same type of candidate. Some schools are better able to be more attractive than others... I think the world is becoming more complex and competitive, no question, but

there's certainly a shortage of international educators in these roles. A lot of retirements are happening.”

This comment is echoed by the director at Echo International School who states:

“Now that I've done some recruiting for principals and for deputy head, the world is not teeming with excellent candidates for these positions, and what I experienced in head of school searches as well, in meeting some of the other candidates, was that there weren't thousands of qualified candidates for that position either. I think you're doing yourself a big favor if you're cultivating potential candidates within. I think there's a reasonable chance that in the end that's going to be the strongest candidate.”

Managing succession is a theme that seems to be in the minds of all three heads.

When asked about how they would better manage the complexities of a succession, all three had something to say. The director at EIS recognized the limitations and disadvantage of conducting a search without professional agency help. He states:

“Most schools, I think, hire an external agency to manage the recruitment. We did, and I think now that's becoming very normal... Even small schools will strongly consider using an external agency to help manage the recruitment process. One of the questions is, what is the point when you know you need to hire someone, is that the point to involve them (external agencies), or would it make sense to be cultivating a relationship with those agencies earlier, so that they might already be getting to know the institution, and might already be able to be thinking about potential candidates who match in terms of philosophy and experience... If you're only engaging them at the very last minute when it's time to find somebody, the scope of their action is somewhat limited by the fact that it's got to happen now. I think this is something that schools are having to think

about because I know of so many cases just recently where schools did a year long search and came out with nothing.”

The director at Bravo International School felt that the complexity of the search demanded a more community-based approach and successful succession events are the result of careful planning rather than luck. His strategy would be inclusive as he states:

“First of all, I would extend it and work with a number of other people. I think initially it'd have to be a brainstorming session or at least an idea-generating discussion around what fundamentally is most important in the succession plan that we're trying to accomplish...I think you could really break that apart into a number of different key goals or goal areas. It's not just succession of the new person. It's the succession of the person leaving. It's ... the involvement of the community... I think a lot of times schools make a mistake ... they actually bring somebody in and they haven't set them up well for success. I think that in a succession plan, a core driver is everything we do must set the new person up for success.”

The head of school at AIS suggests that trust is a fundamental driver of strategic management of succession. In his view, the outgoing leader has an important part to play in managing succession. He states,

“one of the basic, basic things for a good leadership succession for me is that there is trust upfront between the parties that are involved in the succession planning. The current leader is always a part of the succession planning in a way because he has or she has to pave the way for the next person, even transitioning in, because if you leave a mess then transitioning in is a catastrophe for the next person.”

The following discussion presents the three final themes of interest. They are Policymaking, Necessary Conversations, and Internal Leadership Development. These themes can be viewed as sub-themes under the main umbrella theme of strategic succession planning and management. These salient themes emerged from the interviews and were potent enough to warrant further investigation.

Policymaking is understood to be an attempt by international school governing bodies to create policy to provide guidance on procedures and actions necessary for the management of leadership succession. There are two primary actors in this process: the governing body represented by the board chair, and the school director. From the interviews, it is evident that each of these actors has a part to play in managing the process.

When asked if BIS had a codified leadership policy, the director answered the question with an emphatic, no. However, he did offer a substantial qualification. He indicated,

“I wouldn't call it a policy but we have a plan. If I may, key elements of it ... I contractually need to let the school know 12 months in advance if I'm going to be leaving. I've said that's fine, you can leave that contractually there but that's not enough for you. I will always let you know 18 months in advance because 18 months is already too late for me basically. We have some common agreements and plans put in place or ideas put in place of how we'd handle it, but nothing in the sense of if I were gone or the board chair was gone, what that would look like for the new people. . . yeah. I don't think we have that.”

When pressed further to describe what a good succession policy might look like and how a school would initiate the process of codifying strategic succession, the director offered a possible way forward,



“First of all, I would extend it and work with a number of other people. I think initially it would have to be a brainstorming session or at least an idea-generating discussion around what fundamentally is most important in the succession plan that we're trying to accomplish or that we want to accomplish because I think you could really break that apart into a number of different key goals or goal areas. It's not just succession of the new person. It's also the succession of the person leaving. I think a succession plan, a core driver in that is everything we do must set the new person up for success. I think then the clarity around that and who's going to do what.”

He further articulated that a plan of this nature might present some complexity and that it may require the assistance of outside experts. He suggests,

“I think what I would try to do is involve some other smart people and really try to put together an 18 to 24-month plan that could look different based on the time frames that you have, but the core drivers or the goals behind what you're trying to achieve through that succession plan is way beyond more than just trying to find that right person. And I would probably talk to people like you and others and say what ideas do you got? What am I missing? What are we missing? I'd want that policy to be value based around the core drivers and goals and objectives that we have as a school and that we're trying to nurture and develop because ultimately that succession plan has to support and nurture the development of this new person. If they're left to do it on their own, that's a big mistake.”

On the opposite end of the spectrum between no policy in place and a fully articulated policy on leadership succession, EIS has made significant progress on

codifying leadership succession practice. When as about succession as policy, the director explains,

“Yes. There is a standing committee of the board, which deals with continuity of the board, but also deals with continuity of head of school. It's clearly laid out what happens if we're going to have a head of school transition, that this committee is called into action and that it has a chair and that they take certain steps. I think what isn't in there is anything about the sense of longer-term capacity building. There's nothing about that in there. It's really more about if the school learns that the head of school is going to move on and there's going to be a vacancy, then there's a certain procedure that happens to ensure that the board is in a position to start the process of finding the next head of school.”

The board chair at EIS went further and provides detail on the actual policy. When asked if EIS policy documents contained policy related to succession, she detailed,

Yes. Section Four of our policy manual that I wrote. It's about the head of school search process which talks about the process by which it happens in great detail, including timelines, and, if need be, use of a consultant, and (candidates) coming to school and meeting groups of people. It goes into a lot of detail about how that process should happen.

The director also offered a further comment about how the school took time to update the policy after the school's most recent succession event. With respect to the appointment of the current director, she states,

“and after we reviewed his search, we review it again to make sure that it was up-to-date, and added some things based on our experience of the most recent search. Obviously, the search process, which happened two years ago, there's a lot of documentation behind that that is saved in the board under the board

documents, so whoever the next group is can refer to that, and I would hope that whoever the committee is which does the next search, whenever it should be, that they feel able to call on some of the people who led that search. In fact, the person who was search chair was involved in a previous search. There was some understanding of how that should happen.”

It is apparent that there is some attempt by the governing body at EIS to create institutional memory so that future boards can reference the details of the succession event. When asked about the strategic thinking behind the desire to code the succession event for future boards, the board chair offered a further comment on who motivated the idea, she replied,

“When it came to the search process, we referred to actually what is written in the policy manual, what is the process that needs to be followed. We hired a search consultant, though. We interviewed three different search consultants, and picked one, and they were quite proactive in terms of what they suggested, as well.”

Of the three schools, EIS is the only school with a fully articulated policy on leadership succession. It is the school where the deputy director assumed the role of director on the succession of the former director. And, it is the school that went through a relatively turbulent free succession event. Naturally, correlation is not causation, but there is strong evidence to suggest possible recommendations for action.

The next theme in this section is called Necessary Conversations. This theme is referring to conversations that need to happen between the educational leadership and the governing bodies in the interest of clarity. The director at CIS indicates that the

very first step in succession planning is to be able to anticipate the succession event.

He suggests,

“Right from the start when succession planning happens, not that the successor is chosen already, but when the previous one announces it, it's that tough conversation that you announce it early enough so that succession planning can take place.”

He further states that the educational leader should have the willingness to be open about future plans. He says,

“You should admit to yourselves that you might not be here forever in many ways, especially if you look at the international school. And you should be open with those guys.”

The director at BIS states that leadership succession will not be a problem for a well-functioning school where there is clarity of purpose and a shared vision for leadership. He says,

“My vision honestly is if you can cultivate a leadership mindset and concept within your organization, if you leave there shouldn't be even a blip on the radar that I'm gone because of the like mindedness and the thinking and the attitudes of the people who are actually carrying on programs, initiatives, the thinking, the culture development, whatever it may be. I don't think about leaving but I tell you what, when I do start thinking about leaving then I know it's time to leave.”

The board chair at BIS offers a human resource-based response to the theme of necessary conversations. He is concerned with making sure the right people are in the right positions and they are being developed correctly. He states,

“I think that number one is, what names are in the frame, so in the case, in the hit by the bus case, or win the lottery case, who would step in, that's the question you asked earlier. So, who could fill the role now basically if this had to happen. Second, who could fill this role 24 months out, more like it's 18 to 36-month time frame. And there may be a couple of names in that box for different roles. So, first question I think is simply around names in the frame. Second question is about digging into that second box and saying what needs to happen in order for these people to be ready to fill that role in one, two, three years. And then of course logically following that is, what do we need to do, what do you, director, need to do, what do we as a board need to help you with. Or what resources or opportunities do we have to provide to make sure that development opportunity is present. And then of course, there's another conversation that falls logically from that, which is what if there are no names?”

With respect to necessary questions, he states very simply,

“Very simple, given your life situation, how long would you want to be here? How long do you want to do this? And taking into account for example, in (the current director's) case, their kids have now left, both of their kids have left home. So, they're in a different stage of life now. Does that mean that they're really happy staying here?”

The necessary conversations he envisions happening involve planning in five-year increments. In such a conversation he might have with his director, he states,

“What do you want your next five years to look like? And then I think the other question, which is much more interesting is, if you have the time, and you're actually going to be here for the next however many years, and it probably makes no sense to think beyond five years in this day and age, what is it you

want to build? We've got to stop pretending like we aren't leaving because we're leaving. The conversation has to be about that and if it is, let's get that out of the way and let's start having different conversations about what we can do while we're here, while we're still sharing space.”

When asked if the director at EIS was aware of the future plans of his deputy director he was very open and shared that he was aware of the deputy director’s aspirations for a directorship of her own. He indicates,

“Yep, absolutely, and confidentially, we know. She knows and we know and we've all accepted ... this is her third year and she actually already applied for a few positions last year, but we've talked about that she's going to stay for four years, but in her fourth year she'll be looking for a head of school position for what would be her fifth year with us. Like I said, I think you have to accept that because if you're hiring that kind of person you have to accept that's what they're headed to do. But, in the end, I think it's great if she goes on and is a head of school somewhere else, and what better preparation for doing that then being a deputy head in a place like EIS?”

When pressed about his own planning and if he has been open about his own career aspirations, he indicates,

“They (the board) were clear about what they wanted, I was clear and honest with them about my aspirations, so I haven't had any reason to tell them that I'm looking to move on or anything. I do think I try to be as open with them as possible. There have been challenges in the position, when the refugee crisis happened here, there was quite a difficult time when the community was quite divided about what the school should be doing about it and how we should be, or not interact with the refugees who were here. I think I was pretty honest with

them that if we were to take a certain path away from my philosophy and what I believe about why we're here, then I might begin looking. If what the school wants to do doesn't match what I think we should be doing in really fundamental ways, then I wouldn't want to stay and be a head of that school.”

The EIS director’s counterpart is the board chair. Posing the same question to the chair about knowledge of the director’s aspirations the chair indicates,

“At our review we talk about how long he expects to stay on, how long I would like him to stay on for ... it's a verbal commitment, but we understand each other where we stand, and what it takes for him to stay on. We have that conversation every year about how he feels about it, his role ... if he's happy, he's motivated, that's important, obviously. How I can make his job easier, what can I do, and how long he expects to stay. Last year, he said to me he doesn't think anybody should stay longer than 10 years, which is a good start, because I think he feels he needs to move on after 10 years. But he also feels he should commit for at least five years, in order to see the impact coming through. That's great, to have that sort of leeway or commitment from him. This is his third year; his impact has been fantastic. We're going from strength to strength. I hope he doesn't leave because he feels he's done everything he needs to do already.”

The final topic under strategic planning and management is the theme of internal leadership development. This theme is a broad theme on the idea of building leadership capacity within the organization by drawing from the available candidates on staff. In the private sector, this falls under the heading of building a *leadership pipeline* or building *bench strength*. In this section, the directors were very clear about the need to build their benches. The director at BIS indicates,

“We have to rethink leadership. We have to develop our own pipeline of leaders. I don't know where else I can go in the world and find educational leaders who are going to come in and have this philosophy already embedded that we have here. We have leaders in this building, we have aspiring leaders on our four campuses who don't even know they're aspiring leaders yet. By rethinking the leadership concept that we have with our leadership team, where that's going to flow next year is into the development of an aspiring leaders program.”

The board chair at BIS echoes the sentiments of his director on identifying and nurturing aspiring leaders when he suggests,

“I think we can do this in two respects. One is building that capacity or the bench strength in house. We talk about helping the director ensure that he's giving the people on his team the right opportunities to develop. So, for example, we have some board initiatives, there are five big board initiatives we agreed to pursue starting this year. And one of the things we've discussed is where can we have the director's number two take a leadership role to give him more exposure to the board, to give him a freer reign.”

The director at EIS also prefers to look in-house for aspiring leadership candidates. However, he comments on the apparent prevailing wisdom in the international school world of hiring leadership from outside the organization. This comment also speaks to the moderating effect of possible turbulent succession events when an insider takes over as director. He indicates,

“I think that there's a bit of a bias out there that many schools think it's always best to look outside the institution. I come up against that quite a bit, and I think related to the conversation we were having earlier about how international



education affected your work as a teacher, I think there's a lot of value in teachers getting out of their school and seeing how other people do things and seeing how other systems work. I think sometimes that's also interpreted to mean that it's best to bring in a head of school who's going to come in with a lot of external experience. But, I also think there's a lot of value in a head of school who hasn't come externally but has been internally selected, and certainly in my case at (BIS), I can say that my first year as head of school after having been deputy head of school for two years, was far, far smoother than I think it could have possibly been if I'd come from the external. I already had relationships in place, people who already had some idea of who I was and what to expect from me, and so I didn't have to go through that initial storming and figuring out ... people jockeying for position. None of those things had to happen because people had some idea who I was.”

When asked about choosing a deputy head after his own succession journey at BIS, he was very clear about what the goal should be when considering candidates for the position of deputy director. He states,

“I think certainly in replacing myself as the deputy head of school, the board agreed with me that one of the things we definitely wanted to do was pick somebody who in every way imaginable would be a good choice to become the next head of school. Hopefully not immediately, but that that would be something that the person could do. That we were confident the person had the skills, and the personal qualities that we would look for to be the head of school.”

His final comment on hiring an internal candidate speaks to the apparent hiring bias of external over internal candidates, experienced over inexperience candidates. He states,

“In my case, I don't think I would have been a candidate for this job if I hadn't been internal, if they didn't know me already because I think it was pretty clear from them as well, they said want an experienced international school head. I only became a finalist because they already knew me, they had seen me, but I think if I had been applying from external I don't think they would have considered me. There have to be schools that are hiring people without experience.”

Echo International School is the first directorship for this director. Given his relative inexperience, and the tendency to hire directors for outside the institution, on the surface the decision to hire this director appears to be a gamble. With that in mind, the board chair at EIS has the final word on the decision,

“This is his third year; his impact has been fantastic. We're going from strength to strength. I hope he doesn't leave.”

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of in-depth interviewing is to discover lived experiences of the other and the meaning they make from those experiences. The data selections presented in this section represent the best examples of raw data gathered from all participants in this study and are in the exact words of all participants. All excerpts are presented in support of, or as an indication of emerging themes. This sample study was commissioned precisely with the goal of discovering and investigating the salient themes that infuse the topic of leadership succession in international schools. The findings in this chapter are the fruit of this labor. With the raw material aggregated

into categorical themes, it is not time to turn to the work of data analysis. It is the hope of this researcher that meaning is derived from the filtration of all findings through Event System Theory, which is the chosen theoretical model for this study. In this fashion, a narrative will emerge telling a story of leadership succession in international schools.

## **Chapter Five: Analysis and Recommendations**

“Inquiry entails the hard work of locating participants’ views and lives in some intellectual, theoretical, or other disciplinary tradition, and the risk of committing oneself to an interpretation” (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002, p. 216).

### **Introduction**

This concluding chapter is a summary, analysis, and synthesis of results from this multiple sample study on executive leadership succession in international schools. The study’s research questions are the main organizing frame by which findings are summarized and analyzed. As this is an exploratory multiple sample study, any emergent significance will have implications for current and future executive leadership in international schools of the same typology. It is the desire of this researcher to provide a thoughtful and compelling interpretation of findings, and in so doing make a worthwhile contribution to the academic discipline of Organizational Development in general, executive leadership succession in international schools specifically.

This chapter is presented in three main parts: Part one represents the foundation of the study and is the lens by which to view and understand the analysis of emergent themes in this multiple sample study. This section comprises a brief review of the rationale on which this study is built and a concise review of both the conceptual framework that drives the study and the theoretical framework that acts as a lens through which findings are appraised.

Part two begins the summary and analysis of findings. This section is organized by research question. All emergent themes are discussed in the context of the specific research questions in which they emerge.

Part three is the section that presents the limitations, recommendations, and conclusions. The Study limitations offer a very brief summary of methodological choices, the inherent limitations of those choices, and implications on findings. Recommendations are offered in two parts: the recommendations for practice, and recommendations for further research. The recommendations for practice come from the synthesis of all findings and analysis and are presented as a user-friendly guide to structuring and implementing a strategic succession plan. Recommendations for research are a signal to future researchers of the many opportunities to further the work. It is offered in a genuine hope that future research in this important topic area will continue and simultaneously deepen and widen the pool of knowledge in executive leadership succession in international schools. Finally, the conclusion is the point in the study where this researcher looks back over every element of this study and presents the concluding statement on the work.

### **Part One: Introduction to study foundation**

Educational researcher Andy Hargreaves speaks to the ad hoc nature of leadership succession when he states, “Succession is rarely planned and prepared for in advance; it is usually a reactive, rushed-together process” (Fink, 2010, p. xii). Executive Leadership turnover in an international school is inevitable, however, schools experiencing too frequent turnover are known to suffer from a lack of shared purpose, cynicism among teaching staff, and an inability to maintain a school improvement focus over any meaningful time frame leading to any measurable accomplishments. (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012, p. 143). In short, leadership succession “always leads to organizational instability and it is a phenomenon that all organizations must cope with” (Grusky, 1960 p. 105).

The conceptual framework for this study comprises three propositions: first, the fundamental work of every school, international or national, is the decisive promotion of student achievement (DuFour & Marzano, 2015); second, the uninterrupted flow of talented, knowledgeable, and well prepared educational leadership can only happen by the purposeful forecasting of leadership needs based on the strategic goals of the school; and third, succession planning and management is the primary work of the governing body and the executive leader of the international school (Hodson & Chuck, 2015; Hooijberg & Lane, 2016).

Event System Theory (EST) defines an event system as a complex of three interacting components: the strength of the event, the event space (the hierarchical level at which the event happens), and the event time (Morgeson, Mitchell, & Liu 2015, p. 517). In organizations, events occur at every hierarchical level, from the widest and highest environmental level to the molecular individual level, and their effects can travel up, down, or within hierarchical levels (Morgeson, et al., 2015). The advantage in using EST as a framework to analyze leadership succession events is that “EST better describes the multilevel nature and temporal dynamic inherent in organizational phenomena associated with events thereby offering a more comprehensive and veridical account of organizational behavior” (Morgeson, et al., 2015). p. 516).

## **Part 2: Summary and Analysis of Findings**

### **Question One**

The first study question is an orientation to the general understandings and perceptions of the principle leadership actors in each school vis-à-vis planning and management of director leadership succession in international schools.

*Q1. Within the boundaries of the three sample schools, what are the director and Board Chair person's perceptions and understandings of planning and management for director leadership succession events?*

The roles of school director and board chair have a shared interest in the success of the school and the constituencies it serves. At the same time, they have separate and unique leadership emphases. The director is charged with developing and maintaining the structures and systems necessary to delivering the educational product of the school (Hodgson, 2015, p. 27). On the other hand, the main role of the governing body, represented by the board chairperson, is “thinking, considering, evaluating, planning, and serving as a critical friend to the director of school” (Vinge, 2015, p. 35, as cited in Hodgson and Chuck 2015). At its core, the board is the guardian of the school’s mission, and it ensures that the mission of the school remains relevant to the needs of the school community. The board also has the key role in strategic planning development and approval, along with policy formulation and adoption (Vinge, 2015, p. 35, as cited in Hodgson and Chuck 2015). This last element is of particular interest with respect to leadership succession planning and management. Each participant in the leadership pair, the director of the school and the board chairperson, were asked the same questions. Their responses should be viewed through the lens of their individual leadership mandates.

With each participant’s leadership obligation framed by their respective role descriptions, their responses to the fundamental question of what are the Head of School (director) and board chairperson’s perceptions and understandings of leadership succession planning and management can be rightly viewed and appraised. There are two critical themes emerging in this question: Certain Change and Transition.

### **Certain Change**

The research data in the findings section of Chapter Four is organized by research question, then by participant subgroup. The first emergent theme to surface from the participant's responses is the perception of Certain Change. Each board chair uniquely referenced the constant nature of leadership change as a starting point in their responses. The board chair at Bravo International School suggests, "Leadership succession is a process. It is, and should be, in a sense a constant so that the director is always thinking about succession." The board chair at Charlie International School is not only aware of an impending change, but offers a more strategic view, "We're looking actually five to ten years ahead, right now. . . everything we're setting up today is in that direction . . . we are acutely aware that we will have a succession." Finally, the board chair at Echo International School offers a similar appraisal of the impending change in leadership, but further suggests the responsibility for an appropriate strategic response sits squarely within the governing body's mandate for strategic planning; "It's the change of the school leader or the school director . . . the people who manage that are the board of directors, in particular the chair. If there is an occasion where leadership needs to change, then the board manages that process." All three board chairpersons indicate an understanding of constant and inevitable nature of leadership succession. They also seem to hear the call to action for strategic planning and management of leadership succession. That particular theme will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

The school director's responses to the initial study question appear to mirror those of the board chairpersons. However, they were more apt to qualify their responses with unique individualized perspectives on the root issues surrounding succession. The topic of this study is on executive leadership succession in



international schools. As such, the topic of the study, and by extension the topic question, is a central concern for the directors of these three international schools. It should come as no surprise that each director felt compelled to offer their unique appraisal of the question as understood through their experiences with succession. Unlike the board chairpersons who seem to have a more detached understanding of the topic, all of the directors have potent lived experience with international school succession.

All three directors are in agreement on the emergent theme of Certain Change. However, where they differ is on how the element of Certain Change is operationalized in the event of succession. Their comments cover a wide range of topics on when the event of succession actually begins and ends (the changing nature of the event), the temporal nature of succession (the changing time frame within the event), individualized motives (director's) for initiating succession (change of leadership motives), concern for – or possible lack of concern for– the school community the director is succeeding from (change within the school community), and the ad hoc nature of leadership succession (managing change). The comments of the directors do not suggest a general lack of strategic thinking, planning, and management for succession. On the contrary, their comments seem to have an observational awareness that can only come from experience.

The director at BIS understands leadership succession as a journey. He indicates, “I think leadership succession actually begins with the decision to jump into the fray of a job search and a commitment to moving to another international school.” Based on his own experience he believes the decision to “jump into the fray” is made somewhat hastily and without any thought given to the demands of succession and the multiple phases of succession that inevitably come with the decision. He suggests,

“people jump into leadership transition maybe without truly spending the time to be totally aware of all the facets that come with it. When I say facets, I’m talking about the pre-transition phase, the transition phase while you’re living it, and especially the post transition phase.”

The school director at EIS views leadership succession as generally poorly conceived and lacking in critical detail. His experience leads him to believe that succession is poorly comprehended and executed. He states, “in my experience it (succession) is something that has not been terribly well planned for, to the degree that I have even encountered situations where schools do not have a formal job description for the head of school, so it is hard to fill a position when you do not even know exactly what the parameters of the job are.” This director recognizes the need for strategic planning, but his focus is on leadership succession through the cultivation of qualified leadership personnel within the school. This is exemplified in his comment, which points directly to in-house strategic planning for succession. With respect to the role of the director, he indicates the top priority is, “defining what is it they expect a head of school to do . . . deciding what are the best qualities to fill that, . . . then looking long term at how you are cultivating people who can fill those positions.” This response can be viewed as a commentary on the state of leadership succession in general, and as a call for strategic action on planning for succession. The latter understanding will be central in the emergent theme of Strategic Leadership Succession Planning and Management, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

The final response in this theme is from the director at CIS. When asked on his understanding, he offers, “What do I know about it? Actually, I don’t know anything about it.” On the surface his comment appears to confirm the appraisal of the

director from EIS, in that succession is truly misunderstood and, as a result of the lack of awareness, is poorly planned for. However, this director did qualify his initial comment by suggesting that succession is much more about a candidate's motives for succession rather than the quantitative elements of, or the timing of succession. This director views succession as necessary and constant but does not separate the act of succession from the impact of succession on the school community. This director's comments were a clear tip of the hat towards Grusky and his fundamental premise of the disruptive nature of succession on every organization. However, where Grusky recognizes general disruption, this director identifies the people in the school community as the "disrupted", namely the students and the staff of the school. Recognition of the complexity surrounding succession is understood within his comments in this question, but he also understands the inevitability of disruption to the school community and the need for careful concern when he states, "First of all, we have to think about the students, whether this impacts their learning or not. Second, you have to think about your staff."

### **Transition**

The second emergent theme is Transition. Interestingly, this theme is of central concern only to the subgroup of school directors. The rationale for this one-sided appreciation of Transition is very likely linked to unique experiences each director has regarding leadership succession. It is notable, but not surprising that the theme arises only with the directorship. One viable explanation for the director's lopsided weighting on Transition is due in part to the emphasis placed on leadership succession, and the study's narrowly defined role of leadership as the senior executive in the person of the director or head of school. A second reason for the imbalance is that the board chairs do not experience role transition on the same level as the

directors. That is not to suggest they are not aware of Transition, or that it is not an important element. In fact, during the interviews, all three board chairs made reference to their own succession journeys at various points in the conversation. However, the topic parameters were sufficiently well defined so references to personal succession experiences made by board chairs were kept to a minimum. Nevertheless, it is evident from comments made by board chairs that succession at the level of the governing body is a viable parallel topic worthy of study. It is the hope of this researcher that future studies on succession in international schools will focus on succession within the governing body.

As with the theme of Certain Change, the views of the school directors on Transition varies and is once again reflective of each director's empirical knowledge of succession. Each director discusses Transition uniquely providing views and examples from their own experiences with succession. The director at BIS emphasizes three phases of leadership succession. He names each phase when he states, "I'm talking about the pre-transition phase, the transition phase while you're living it (succession), and especially the post transition phase." For this director, each of these unique phases requires special attention if succession is to be successful. His advice to directors who have made the decision to move from one institution to another is, "You need to have a clear understanding of how that journey (the three transitional phases) is going to look as an individual." The director offers an example from his own succession experiences while transitioning to BIS as the director. His example is from the pre-transition phase. While he is still the director at his previous school, he was meeting with BIS personnel to discuss matters relating to his role as the new director. He states,

“we met once a month with the transition committee and we would talk about the school. . . about what was happening. That involved good and bad conversations, or painful conversations, of things that maybe were not going so well here (BIS). Again, the purpose of all that was not for me to pass judgment. It was for me to begin to develop thematic ideas or plans of where the issues were here (BIS) that I was going to inherit.”

From this comment, there are two interesting conclusions. The first is that succession will put extra demands on leaders who find themselves in the transitional phases. Directors are at once attending to the leadership of their current institutions and simultaneously holding a decision-making role at their new school. This phase can be time consuming and add stress to an already stress-filled experience. The second conclusion is the need to be fully prepared to accept the extra responsibility if the leadership transition is to be as turbulent free as possible.

Transition timing is a sub-element of the transition theme. The director at BIS discusses the ever-increasing time frames for succession transitions, which he characterizes as awkward. On the timing of these successions, he states, “A lot of international school directors now are having to announce 18 to 24 months ahead of time that they are looking and they are going to be leaving. For example, when I came to this school (BIS) I had an 18-month window where I was already hired here but I had to finish gracefully at my previous post.” Awkward may be the best word to describe this timing. If 18 to 24 months is becoming the norm, then succession from one school to another will possibly involve some difficult conversations between the director and the board. Furthermore, if “finishing gracefully” is the goal, then it is critical the director does not abandon their leadership duties at the school they are leaving for the sake of the other. Once again, the pressure is on the succeeding

director to manage their dual roles, perhaps for longer periods of time than initially anticipated. In the interest of clarity, it should be stated that the director made his comments referencing increasing time frames in reference to perceived top-tier international schools. Competitive pressure for comparatively few positions means that interested directors must compete early for these spots.

The director at CIS echoes the comments of the director at BIS regarding the long transition periods and the need to be present in two schools at once. However, he further adds an important transitional caveat not to forget about the family transitioning along with the director. He states, “they (board representatives) took care of my wife, and really nurtured her and invited her, and made sure that our private circumstances were working out very well. I was very appreciative of that as well.” It is evident from the CIS director’s comments that he values the human touch, especially in regards to caring for his family’s circumstances. He finishes his thought with, “You must look at the private dimension of the succession as well as the professional.” The director’s final comment appears to divide succession into the professional and private domains. This division coupled with the three transition phases would suggest a two-dimensional succession matrix where attention is paid to the private and professional domains within each of the three phases of transition.

Finally, the director at EIS offers his personal experience on succession Transition. In his comments, we find yet a third unique consideration for the theme of Transition. For this director, leadership succession was a comparatively turbulent free endeavor requiring not much more than office relocation and an expanded job description. This director held the deputy director role before being appointed to the directorship of EIS. On his transition he indicates, “I can say that my first year as head of school after having been deputy head of school was far, far smoother than I

think it could have possibly been if I'd come from the external.” This director was appointed after a formalized exhaustive search was performed where external candidates were brought in to meet the school community. The director further states, “I think my presence as the deputy head of school would also have facilitated a smoother transition for whoever (new director) came in because there would have been somebody in second position who I think people knew and trusted, and could help maintain certain developments that were happening. I think that gave people a lot of confidence.”

It is evident from these comments that the role of deputy director greatly dampened the possibility of transition turbulence for both the community and the director. The moderating effect of the deputy director position is evidently a potent element in this study. It will be explored in some depth further on in this chapter as it appears to dominantly straddle multiple themes.

## **Question Two**

The second research question in this multiple sample study is designed to consider the disruptive effects, if any, of leadership succession in the three sample schools.

*Q2. In what ways have past school leadership succession events been a disruptive influence in the life of the three sample schools, and what is the nature of the disruption?*

Unlike the other research questions where there are multiple themes, this question is singular in its approach. Since the question is framed on the idea of disruption as a force in leadership succession events, it makes some sense that there should only be one emergent theme in this question as a result.

## **Disruption**

For the purpose of the study, the term disruption denotes disturbances or problems that interrupt an event, activity, or process. In the context of an international school, the turnover in the director role is a watershed moment for the school and its stakeholder groups. (Tebbe, Stewart, Hughes, & Adams, 2017). By way of review, the first premise of the study's conceptual framework is the foundation on which the second research question is set. It states, the fundamental work of every school, international or national, is the decisive promotion of student achievement (DuFour & Marzano, 2015). With this in mind, an event such as leadership succession may have a deleterious effect on student achievement as a by-product of the disruptive nature of succession. It is beyond the scope of this study to quantify the effects, if any, of succession on student achievement. However, a study based on quantitative methods would be a welcomed addition to the body of research in this important topic area.

On review of findings under this theme, it is evident that each participant has a unique story to tell about the disruptive effects of succession on their respective schools. When viewed as a whole, the interview data from all participants appear to point towards two distinct aspects of disruption: the first is the general organizational disruption associated with a new leadership, the second is the disruption associated with a change in philosophical direction. However, disruption is not uniformly felt across all sample schools. The magnitude of the disruption, or event strength, varies depending on factors such as the school's preparedness for leadership succession, the turnover of leadership within a short period of time, and by extension, the number of directors within the same time frame, the existence of a deputy director to moderate



the potential disturbance, and the existence of simultaneous economic factors beyond the school's control.

With the general organizational disruption attributed to a change in directorship, the research data appears to be cast into two distinct time frames: a time prior to the current director, and the time fame with the current director. Interestingly, each participant relates a similar anecdote of a time in the school's recent history with a director who served for a very long period of time; 20 years and 21 years respectively in the case of BIS and CIS. In the case of EIS, the decade-long tenure of their previous director was long by industry standards, but not as long as BIS and CIS. In the case of CIS, leadership succession occurs nearly simultaneously with a massive downturn in the global economy. The "double punch" of succession and global recession appears to magnify the generalized angst felt by nearly every stakeholder in the school community.

The second type of disruption is associated with a possible misalignment between the new director's vision and the school's current educational initiatives, or a fundamental sea change in the educational direction of the school. The following is an analysis of the Disruption phenomenon organized by school responses.

Disruption at BIS took the form of a strategic change in the school's mission and was enacted by the appointment of a new and current director. Prior to the new director assuming his new role, BIS was under the skillful leadership of a single director for a period of approximately 20 years. On succession, the current director was brought in to lead the school and was given the mandate to take the school down a different strategic pathway. On the fundamental reason for his hiring, the director at BIS states,

“My (predecessor at BIS) was ... a true entrepreneurial spirit, (with) a real strength on that. The reason I was hired was to bring in my systems thinking and actually introduce a new era into the school and professionalize a number of the initiatives and program efforts and streamline them so there was clarity and focus of where the school was going.”

This is an example of the type of disruption that is planned and organized as part of a changing strategic mission of the school. This director was bringing a new and specific set of leadership skills that had been absent in the prior leader. When asked about the inevitability of disruption to school improvement initiatives as a result of succession, the director is very clear about his perception. He states,

“No. ... but I can see how it could be if the succession plan wasn't carefully thought out or if the board was detached and didn't really have a good understanding of what was happening on a day-to-day basis ... The reason I say no is I think often that (succession) can easily be used as an excuse or rationalization why a program or an initiative has failed. Obviously, a new person can come in and say ‘I'm not aligned with that philosophy’. I really worry schools are allowing that (succession) to be an excuse to not stay ahead of the conversation.”

From these comments, it is evident this director is not prepared to accept stalled school improvement as a direct result of leadership succession. He acknowledges the potential for disruption and accepts that organizational disruption is a by-product of leadership succession, but only in cases where schools have not been strategically active in managing succession.

The school, which seemed to suffer the greatest amount of disruption as a result of leadership succession, is CIS. Both the director and the board chair have an

interesting story to tell about the disruptive nature of leadership succession. Over a period of time spanning approximately a decade, CIS was forced to manage a series of leadership successions while simultaneously suffering the effects of a global economic recession. CIS, like so many international schools across the world, is reliant on a strong global economy since many of the students at CIS are children of a globalized workforce. Falling economic conditions can have a very fast and decisive impact on employment levels in the localized area. The net result of such a condition is nearly always the loss of student population.

The theme of Disruption is particularly acute at CIS. The disruptive influence due to leadership succession comes directly after the tenure of a school director who had held the position for 21 years. In the decade following the director's departure, a steady series of directors came and left. The board chair summarizes the situation; "I think they had about six or seven heads in that time. Nobody lasted here." The school community was unsettled by the constant turnover in leadership and the morale among staff was at an all-time low. Even the appointment of the current director presented the challenge of an unanticipated five-month gap in leadership because of issues related to the succession event at the new director's prior school. The domino effect of disruptive succession events resulted in the need for the appointment of an interim director, but even this did little to quell the anxiety among the stakeholder groups at CIS.

There is an interesting element to the CIS succession story that was not explicitly articulated during the interview with the director. As indicated in the transcript, the director at CIS delayed his departure from his previous school until the end of December. Under normal circumstances, the transition of leadership would have taken place over the summer vacation months and the new leader would be in

place to start the school year in August. However, based on this director's desire to oversee a smooth start-up at his previous school, the director delayed his departure for five months and remained in his directorship. On the surface, this decision was clearly made with the very best of intentions. However, based on detailed information provided by the director and the CIS board chair the findings seem to suggest amplified disruption at both schools.

Why did this director stay in his role so late? Was the director's decision to delay his transition to CIS part of a larger strategic plan to see his previous school through what would be a tumultuous succession event? Did his decision to delay his transition have the desired result of moderating the turbulence at his previous school? Did his decision to stay longer amplify the disruption at his previous school beyond what would have normally been expected from a typical succession event? These questions are not simple in their scope and require more evidence and a significant amount of analysis. In fact, to fully understand the true extent of the director's decision to delay his departure, data would have to be gathered from various actors closely involved in the succession event at the director's previous school. This succession event is compelling enough to warrant further analysis and study. However, as with most tangential evidence, it falls beyond the boundaries of this study.

In the final analysis, all the circumstances surrounding the succession event at CIS was nearly a perfect storm in its magnitude. The event strength was amplified by economic conditions beyond the control of the school, and by a decision to delay the transition. The board chair summarized the situation perfectly and succinctly in his statement, "It was a crisis. Nobody said it was a crisis, but that's what it was." A question that naturally arises from this anecdote is what, if anything, could have been

done to moderate the turbulence event strength at CIS and, by extension, at the director's previous school? The answer must surely be in the purposeful strategic planning and management of succession.

Finally, the story at EIS is much different. Evidence from both the director and the board chair indicate that EIS was able to ride out their succession event relatively free of any community anxiety. The current director held the position of deputy director for two years prior to his appointment to the director. In statements made by the director and the chair, it is this fact, combined with a very clear succession policy that is responsible for the turbulent-free event.

Based on elements of Event System Theory, a possible conclusion might be that the succession event lacked strength in comparison to the magnitude of the events at BIS or CIS. However, this would be an incorrect conclusion. The succession event did not lack strength, what it lacked was disruptive strength. The governing body and the director had taken the necessary time and energy to install leadership structures and craft a codified succession plan in anticipation of succession. When the succession event occurred, the school community was ready for it.

### **Question three:**

The final research question investigates the extent to which sample schools are actively planning for and managing leadership succession.

*Q3. In what ways are sample schools actively engaged in strategic succession planning, and what elements of that strategy, if any, have been effective?*

The emergent themes under this question are Strategic Succession Planning and Management, Internal Leadership Development, Necessary Conversations, Policymaking, and Deputy Director Appointment. The analysis begins with the

Strategic Succession Planning and Management, then continues with the other three emergent themes

### **Strategic succession planning and management**

According to Rothwell (2016), strategic succession planning and management is the process of stabilizing the tenure of key personnel to ensure the continued effective performance of the organization by providing for the development, replacement, and strategic application of key people (p. 6). Rothwell (2016) suggests an increasing awareness that succession is not a simple balancing of the leadership equation. If succession were an uncomplicated exchange of one leader for another, then anybody with a reasonable resume would do. However, the problem of leadership succession is much more systemic than meets the eye. Rothwell (2016) indicates that when experienced leaders leave, the tangible loss of capacity to do the work is the least of the problem. The very real cost to the organization of unmanaged succession is the unanticipated loss of accumulated wisdom and institutional memory, which leaves with the departing leader.

Strategic succession planning and management is the overarching theme in this research question. The question is asked in such a way as to assume that sample schools are, to some extent, actively engaged in strategically forecasting and planning for succession. This assumption is really at the heart of the study. Given the current number of international schools in operation worldwide, it is entirely conceivable that a significant number of international schools, a quantity not known to this researcher at this time, are not actively engaged in the strategic forecasting of leadership succession. It is well beyond the scope of this multiple sample study to determine the number of schools currently engaged in the work of succession planning and management. However, this would be a fruitful line of inquiry and it is hoped that

future researchers will make an attempt at quantification. This fact would be helpful to know.

What is known currently about succession is two interrelated facts: the first is that succession is inevitable, because the second is the average tenure of an international school director is 3.7 years. John Benson (2011) published his research findings on the problem of too-frequent administrative turnover and the average tenure of international school administrative executives. Benson (2011) highlights two themes relating to administrative turnover - the average tenure of international school heads and the reasons they left their posts. Benson's study indicates the average tenure for chief administrators (director) is 3.7 years, which is an increase from Hawley's (1994) findings of 2.8 years. With these two facts in mind, there is a realization that leadership succession is only a matter of time, in fact, 3.7 years on average. What follows is an analysis of emergent themes under the broad umbrella of succession planning and management.

When asked about their preparedness to strategically manage succession, participants offered comments indicating varying degree of readiness. The board chair at CIS offered this comment, "We're looking actually five to ten years ahead, right now. . . Everything we're setting up today is in that direction. But looking for the successor, we are acutely aware that we will have a succession." The director at CIS was even more succinct when asked if he felt leadership succession could be managed better. He emphatically stated, "Absolutely. I'm sure it can be managed better, but it can only be managed before the leadership succession comes along." The director at BIS suggests that two of the fundamental difficulties in attempting to manage succession are a result of ever-increasing succession time frames effectively stretching succession transitions out as far as 24 months, and the problem of too few

quality candidates to draw from. On the first issue, he states, “The really top international schools are really casting careful searches. They're trying to lock their top candidate up ... 18 to 24 months in advance.” On the second problem, he further indicates, “There's a shortage of really... experienced international educators for these roles. Just like with great teachers, everybody's looking for the same type of candidate.” However, it is the director at EIS who offers the most compelling comment on strategic succession planning and management. He also presents the foundation for the next emergent theme. He succinctly states, “Now that I've done some recruiting for principals and for deputy head, the world is not teaming with excellent candidates for these positions.” His prescription for the problem is to actively develop the candidate schools need from within their own faculty. This is the next emergent theme.

### **Internal Leadership Development**

When the director at EIS states, “I think you're doing yourself a big favor if you're cultivating potential candidates within. I think there's a reasonable chance that in the end that's going to be the strongest candidate.”, he is speaking from a position of knowledge and experience. The director at BIS offers a parallel comment on developing internal bench-strength and the reasons why this is critical. He states, “We have to develop our own pipeline of leaders. I do not know where else I can go in the world and find educational leaders who are going to come in and have this philosophy already embedded . . . we have leaders in this building, we have aspiring leaders on our campuses who don't even know they're aspiring leaders yet.” This director commented further on future plans for a developmental program for aspiring leaders from within the school community. This program will begin operation during the next academic year and will draw exclusively from the faculty at BIS. The goal is



to develop future leadership for the school, shaped in the image of the school's mission and vision.

The argument for building and maintaining an internal pipeline of candidates strongly resonates with findings made in the early days of leadership succession research. In the 1970s, much of the academic research in leadership succession was fixed on topics related to *successor origin* and *succession frequency*. Under the *successor origin* umbrella, the dichotomy between the inside vs. outside successor was gaining interest, and generating confusion. The need to clarify what was meant by the terms Insider and Outsider was evident. Traditionally, outsiders were defined as individuals not employed by the organization, while insiders were defined as current or previous employees. However, in his study of university and college presidents, Birnbaum (1971) challenged these traditional definitions by introducing the concept of industry or contextual familiarity. Universities commonly selected new presidents, who were technically outsiders, but Birnbaum found that outsiders were not alike. Successors, who had been socialized and trained in institutions with similar characteristics to their receiving organizations, experienced less post-succession conflict and greater organizational stability.

Hemlich and Brown added a new dimension to the insider/outsider terminology debate by defining outsiders as individuals beyond the predecessor's "executive role constellation" (1972, p. 372). This definition operationalized the idea that an outsider might be someone who was a member of the organization but did not enjoy the status of belonging to the executive inner circle. In addition to these findings, other conclusions were reached: outside successors, who are socialized and trained in organizations similar to those selecting, limit post-succession organizational conflict and promote organizational stability (Birnbaum, 1971); and inside successors

are associated with less post-succession organizational change (Hemlich and Brown, 1972).

### **Necessary Conversations**

The New York-based Conference Board, a business research non-profit, conducted a study analyzing CEO succession events at S&P 500 companies from 2000 to 2014. One of the major findings in the study was that boards are reluctant to broach succession planning because they fear antagonizing the incumbent CEO and putting their working relationships at risk (Hooijberg & Lane, 2016, p. 14). Personal discomfort notwithstanding, governing bodies in international schools are compelled to take action to safeguard the long-term interests of the school community it serves. Therefore, necessary conversations are a must.

Once a school has decided there is a need to engage in Strategic Succession Planning and Management, they have tacitly agreed to change the nature of the conversations around the boardroom table. Necessary Conversations emerge as an important theme among all participants' responses. The nature of these conversations is based on a willingness to be frank and honest about the future direction of the school and the need to plan for leadership succession. These conversations can be very strategic in nature, but they can also be quite personal, and by extension, quite difficult. Examples of both are provided in this section.

The board chair at EIS succinctly frames the nature of these conversations as a series of fundamental questions. The chair asks, "What are we looking for? What does the school need? Who is already there? What is the ideal candidate look like? Do you search internally, or do you search externally? What are pros and cons of that? Do we have systems in place to groom the next generation of potential leaders in the

school?” These questions form the backbone of the strategic conversations necessary to formalize and codify strategic succession planning.

The board chair at BIS offers a tactical approach to succession planning and necessary conversations and questions. He suggests,

“I would like to know who are the three potentially best directors for this school anywhere in the world... I mean specifically for this context. Who would those three be, because I think that I should know them? For example, when I travel to London, I should have lunch with some great director or deputy director at some great private school in London who we (the board) might be interested in hiring someday. My view of the bench is that there's an internal and an external bench that I should be keeping an eye on.”

This is an interesting tactic. It is not enough to have a great strategy for succession planning if there are no tactical initiatives in place to operationalize the strategy. The strategy is to recognize the nature of succession and all the attending issues; a tactic is an action or strategy carefully planned to achieve a specific end. This director appears to represent a governing body, which understands their options and is ready to cultivate relationships with directors who are considered to be leaders among their cohort.

On the other hand, Necessary Conversations can easily be more personal nature. For directors, questions in this area may be difficult to answer, and could even be seen as giving too much personal and professional strategy away. The board chair at EIS presents an excellent example of the nature of these questions when he hypothetically asks,

“Given your (director) life situation, how long would you want to be here? How long do you want to do this? What do you want your next five years to look

like? I think the other question, which is much more interesting is, if you have the time, and you are actually going to be here for the next however many years, and it probably makes no sense to think beyond five years in this day and age, what is it you want to build?”

This line of questioning may be uncomfortable but given the need to be strategic and tactical about succession, it is critical to have different conversations when directors assume leadership roles; conversations that focus on what can be achieved in the limited time (five-year increments seems like a good start) available to the director and the school.

This line of thought mirrors the approach advocated by Hoffman, Casnocha, and Yeh (2014) in their book *The Alliance: Managing Talent in the Networked Age*. The authors of this book advocate for a transformation of the employer/employee relationship, one which is built on honesty and conceptualizes careers as a series of successive tours of duty. The “tour of duty” represents a commitment by employer and employee to a specific mission of finite duration. The notion of short-term, goal-oriented commitments is reflected in the comment from the BIS board chair. Fundamentally, the proposition of the Tour of Duty is that everyone (school director and governing body) commit to the organizational relationship in smaller steps and, as with any kind of meaningful relationship, the relationship deepens as each side proves themselves to each other (Hoffman, Casnocha, & Yeh, 2014). This type of relationship is built on a foundation of honesty and requires a much different qualitative conversation.

### **Policymaking**

Policymaking is the process of arranging laws or policies according to a system or plan. Leadership succession embedded in international school policy is the

nature of this emergent theme. From the data gathered at the three sample schools, it is evident the general state of policy preparedness with respect to Strategic Succession Planning and Management is not uniform. In fact, with the exception of EIS, there is an evident lack of policy specific to proactive Strategic Succession Planning and Management. On the other hand, all three schools have codified policies with respect to reactive succession procedures once a succession has been announced. These policies provide guidance for board members of the governing body to act for members of the governing body in general, and the selection of the board chairperson specifically. The reason Policymaking emerged as a salient theme is because all six participants spoke to the importance of having a carefully structured set of policies to manage the succession of the director. Interestingly, participants from BIS and CIS expressed some bewilderment at the realization they did not have a formalized succession policy. It is worth noting that both board chairs at BIS and CIS recognized the problem of not having a formal policy in place and made a commitment to move forward with codifying a strategy. When asked if there was an existing policy on director search process, the board chair answered emphatically with, “Yes. section four of our policy manual that I wrote. It's about the head of school search process.”

### **Deputy Director Appointment**

The final emergent theme in this study is the presence of a deputy director position in the three sample schools. Of the three sample schools, BIS and EIS each have a deputy director in their executive leadership team. The CIS does not currently have a deputy director position and has never historically had one. The deputy position emerged as a potent theme in the data when it was consistently referenced in other emergent themes in this study. For example, the deputy position was mentioned as a moderating factor under the Disturbance theme. It was also referenced as a

supporting factor in the Internal Development and Policymaking themes. The emergence of a single factor triangulating multiple themes indicates potency, and it is considered sufficiently salient to emerge as its own theme.

The influence of the deputy director is felt most strongly at EIS. Of the three schools, EIS is the only school with a fully articulated policy on leadership succession. It is also the school where the deputy director assumed the role of director on the succession of the former director, and it is the school whose recent succession event was relatively turbulent free. Naturally, correlation is not causation, but there is strong evidence to suggest that the role of deputy director has enough of a moderating effect as to be a significant tactic in strategic succession planning and management.

Evidence to this effect is provided in the data findings. The board chair at BIS views the deputy director role as a type of insurance against turmoil in the event unexpected vacancy in the director's role. He indicates, "At the director level, it's clear to us that in an emergency situation, that we would turn to the deputy director to step in for a period of time while we conducted a search." For the director at EIS, having held the deputy role before his appointment to director served him well in his new role. He states, "I can say that my first year as head of school after having been deputy head of school was far, far smoother than I think it could have possibly been if I'd come from the external." The director at EIS goes on to add that even if he had not been appointed, having a deputy director acted as a dampening agent against the likely organizational anxiety that accompanies leadership succession. He indicates, "I think having a deputy head is a kind of guarantor of a certain amount of continuity. I would also say that having that second position just made everybody a little calmer about it. Even if the person whom they had chosen as

head were completely unknown, I think they would see the continuity of the deputy head as being something to help hold things steady.”

Finally, the director at EIS offers a suggestion in choosing the deputy director. He suggests, “pick somebody who in every way imaginable would be a good choice to become the next head of school.” This advice is critically important. In the event of an emergency vacancy or a planned transition, having a qualified and experienced person as the deputy, who could easily step in and competently assume the operational decision-making role of the school, is a great comfort to the community. Furthermore, should the school cast a wide net in the search for their next director, it is comforting to know there is at least one candidate on the short list that knows the school better than anyone else.

### **Part three: Limitations Recommendations and Conclusion**

#### **Study Limitations**

This study is an exploratory qualitative multiple sample study. Case (sample) study research examines “a contemporary phenomenon in depth and in its real-world context” (Yin, 2017, p. 237). Yin (1994) states, “when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 1), case (sample) study research is a comprehensive and appropriate method to investigate the “how” or “why” qualitative research questions. Multiple sample study research has the potential to provide greater confidence in findings generated from the overall study by way of triangulation, which improves the accuracy and completeness of the case study, strengthening the credibility of the research findings (Cronin, 2017; Yin, 2017).

The interview is the preferred method for data collection in research studying a phenomenon (Bevan, 2014). Interviewing is the most widespread empirical research

method across the human and social sciences (Brinkman, 2013). The benefit of using the interview method is that it resembles conversation with a consistent line of inquiry rather than fully structured probing (Yin, 2017, p. 110). Semi-structured streams of questions are fluid, but also reflective and reflexive as the conversation ranges. The fundamental assumption when utilizing semi-structured interviewing as a primary research method is that the meaning subjects make of their own experiences affect the way in which they carry out those experience, which in turn is reflected in their explanation of those experiences. (Blumer, as cited in Seideman, 2013, p. 18).

The goal in choosing an appropriate methodology in qualitative research is to achieve data saturation, i.e., when the collection of new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation (Mason, 2010). Interviews in general, semi-structured interviews in particular, are one such method by which to reach data saturation. Bernard (2012) stated that the number of interviews needed for a qualitative study to reach data saturation was a number he could not quantify, but the researcher takes what [they] can get. It is understood that in qualitative studies samples are generally smaller than those used in quantitative studies. Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003) suggest qualitative samples are subject to the law of diminishing returns; as the study goes on more data does not necessarily lead to more information. The occurrence of a piece of data, or a code, is all that is necessary to ensure that it becomes part of the analytical framework. The frequency of emergent themes is rarely important in qualitative research. In fact, the occurrence of one piece of noteworthy data has the potential to be as remarkable and as useful as several in understanding a topic. Nevertheless, in spite of the many compelling reasons to use the chosen methodology, there are limitations in qualitative research and the findings therein.



At its fundamental core this study, and the data gathered as a result, is the result of human interaction between the researcher and the six sample participants. Patton (2002) suggests the human factor is at once the greatest strength and the fundamental weakness of qualitative inquiry and analysis - a scientific two-edged sword (p. 433). In spite of best efforts to attend to best-practice recommendations for designing and conducting high quality exploratory multiple sample study research, there are limiting factors, which must be considered when reviewing findings in this study. There are three fundamental limitations in this study: the nature of semi-structured interviewing leading to the possibility of narrative fallacy; sample study findings cannot be generalized to the wider study population; and data collection is time-consuming and costly.

The first limitation is based on the nature of semi-structured interviewing, which necessarily implies results are not uniform. Data gathered in this fashion is difficult to analyze and does not fit neatly into standard, convenient categories. In addition, there is the ever-present danger of narrative fallacy, which is the inclination to simplify data and information by over interpretation. The narrative fallacy is the product of a human preference for compact stories rather than complex data (Taleb, 2007, p. 63). Dense narratives based on thick descriptions can provide some protection against the narrative fallacy, but in general, the best protection against the error of narrative fallacy is systematic and rigorous checks for validity and reliability during data collection and data summary (Flyvbjerg, 2007, p. 311).

The second limitation is that sample study findings cannot be generalized to the wider study population, which in the case of this study is the entire global population of international schools. However, it is a contested issue as to whether generalization is an appropriate demand for case (sample) study research in the first

place (Ruddin, 2006). Flyvbjerg (2007) provides a list of five misunderstandings about case study research, the first of which is the generally accepted view that generalized, theoretically developed knowledge is more valuable than empirical case knowledge. In the face of this criticism, Flyvbjerg (2007) argues it must be understood that the nature of case (sample) studies: bounded, contextualized, and focused on a single phenomenon, parallels basic learning and is a necessary condition for moving from empirical knowledge to formulating generalizable knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2007, p. 304).

Third, data collection is time-consuming and costly and as a result, the number of cases is limited by available resources. In the case of this study, this is a very true statement. The three sample schools were in three different countries in Western Europe situated on round-trip driving route 2200 kilometers in length. This researcher is based in North America, which therefore required a return airline ticket to Europe and car rental for seven days. This multiple sample study contains three schools and six participants. If more schools were added to the study, both the financial costs and time commitment would necessarily increase.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

As just noted, there are limitations to transferability and generalizability in qualitative case (sample) study research. Nevertheless, findings in this study appear to indicate a viable set of best practice recommendations for the executive leadership and governing bodies of international schools interested in moving their strategic succession planning forward.

Rothwell (2016) establishes strategic succession planning and management as the process of stabilizing the tenure of key personnel to ensure the continued effective performance of the organization by providing for the development, replacement, and

strategic application of key people (p. 6). Strategic planning and management is to recognize the ever-present nature of succession and all the attending issues. The recommendation is to anticipate succession, plan for it, and establish a tactical approach to managing the event. Tactics are those granular actions operationalized to anticipate the event, manage the event, and then plan for the next succession event. Managing succession events cannot be done in a few weeks leading up to the director's exit. Therefore, be constantly building systems in schools that are stable, confident and able to withstand the disruption of a succession event. The guiding mission of any strategic succession plan is the protection and continuation of all educational structures in the school. Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommendations for practice international school governing bodies can adopt to improve their succession practices:

1. Be mindful of succession at all times. Don't be seduced by those quiet moments in the life of every school when all systems are working optimally, it can change in an instant. In a healthy school system, both governing bodies and school directors must have leadership succession in the back of their minds all the time. Benson (2011) establishes the average tenure of school director at 3.7 years. Succession events will happen and it is only a matter of when, not if. A future orientation towards strategic succession planning and management must be a priority for the governing body and the current director.
2. Strategic planning involves forecasting the school's future growth prospects in five and 10-year increments. The ideal director's leadership profile must identify the critical skills, expertise, and experience needed to execute the school's growth strategy. Governing bodies should identify the requisite set of

leadership skills and talents the school will require of its next director to insure the long-term continued growth of the school.

3. Build a strong leadership pipeline of internal talent. Internal leadership candidates should be identified by the succession and talent development sub-committee and formally developed. The focus of development should be in accordance with the skills, expertise, and experience needed for the future of the school. The training must be comprehensive and aspiring leaders should be provided with opportunities to lead in a variety of school areas. Aspiring leadership candidates should be mentored by experienced leadership and rotated into multiple school functions, including financial budgeting, and liaising with the governing body.
4. The deputy director role is an important component of managing the succession event. Deputy director development is part and parcel of developing a pipeline of leadership candidates. Based on findings in this study, the role of deputy director appears to be a significant moderating factor in managing the potential disruption of a succession event. The deputy position emerged as a potent theme in the finding when it was consistently triangulated in other emergent themes in this study.
5. In addition to identifying and developing strong internal candidates, a succession and talent development sub-committee of the governing body should be tasked with identifying strong external candidates. As the board chair from BIS stated, “I would like to know ...the three potentially best directors for this school anywhere in the world... Who would those three be, because I think that I should know them.” This recommendation is not a suggestion to cast a wide net and poach the best candidates from other

international schools. This recommendation is about becoming knowledgeable about potential leadership candidates who are considered best in class and establishing lines of communication with them. When succession happens, opening a dialogue with a known and vetted candidate will simplify the process of shortlisting excellent quality candidates.

6. Have the necessary conversations. Both director and governing body must be involved in ongoing conversations. Careful planning and management must be seen as a long-term, joint endeavor. Succession planning and management is not the responsibility of one party or the other. The process requires input from the current director and the governing body. As the director from BIS stated,
7. The governing body should contract the services of a highly recommended human resource firm with a proven track record for talent management expertise and executive succession. An outside firm can be the objective eyes and ears of the governing body in the hunt for the next leader and can ensure that the necessary structures and processes are put in place to meet the international school's strategic needs. When the time comes to replace the director, there will be a pool of highly qualified candidates from which to choose.
8. Be mindful of the complex nature of leadership transition. It is also important to remember that leadership transition will often involve an entire family, not just the new director. The director at BIS identified three phases of leadership transition: the pre-transition phase, the transition phase, and the post-transition phase. Each phase in the overall transition commands unique attention to

detail from both parties, the transitioning leader, and the receiving school.

The director at BIS stated it very succinctly,

“The first thing I always look for in a school is the depth and breadth in services that are being provided in the HR program. It tells me a lot about the values of the organization. If you have a school that's focused, if you want an organization that's truly focused on people, you better be providing the depth and breadth of services to help them in succession transition.”

9. Formulate official policy to attend to reactive emergency transitions and separately proactive long-term succession plans. The reactive emergency succession plan will be necessary in the event of unanticipated succession. These policies will involve members of the senior school leadership team. Policy elements might include but are not limited to, procedures to identify and install the next leader, procedures for accessing outside interim leadership if needed, next-steps in the management of the emergent succession event and disseminating pertinent information to the wider community about the management of the unanticipated succession.

The proactive long-term succession plans will attend to the strategic mission of the school. When crafting the long-term succession plan, the governing body should imagine the idealized future director profile with all the appropriate skills, expertise, and experience to drive the school forward. This policy document will be a living record should be amended accordingly as the school's values, mission, and vision changes over time.

## **Recommendations for Research**

During the evolution of this dissertation, from its embryonic stages, all the way through to its final manifestation, ideas for further study have occasionally emerged. These were thought-provoking parallel ideas adequately associated to the main dissertation topic as to warrant interest but were sufficiently out of scope to be extraneous to the main event. As there is but one study topic in a dissertation, those emerging ideas needed to be shelved for future study. The epigraph at the top of this section is a humorous, but prescient statement on the need to pursue the dissertation topic with singular focus and put distracting notions away. Nevertheless, as those distracting notions emerged, they were cataloged for future reference. In no particular order, these are the five emergent ideas that would be excellent lines of inquiry for future study:

- From comments made by board chairs during the interview process, succession at the level of the governing body would be a viable parallel topic worthy of study.
- Leadership succession may have a deleterious effect on student achievement as a by-product of the disruptive nature of succession. It is beyond the scope of this study to quantify the effects, if any, of succession on student achievement. However, a study designed to look at the qualitative and quantitative impact of leadership succession on student achievement would be an interesting and welcomed addition.
- This multiple sample study is built on three sample schools. Of the three schools, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that one of them has taken steps towards a formalized strategic plan for succession. This is not to suggest that this ratio is reflected in the ratio of all international schools currently practicing some form of strategic succession planning. Given the current number of

international schools in operation worldwide, it is entirely conceivable that a number of international schools, a quantity completely unknown to this researcher, are actively engaged in the strategic forecasting of leadership succession. This would be a fruitful line of inquiry and it is hoped that future researchers will make an attempt at quantification.

- The choice of schools was intentionally limited to a very specific type of international school as detailed in the sample selection component of Chapter Three. Based on the current international school typology, there are three basic types of international schools in existence:

Type A: These schools were established largely to cater to expatriate families, for whom the local education system is not appropriate. English is the primary spoken and written medium of instruction and communication (Brummitt, & Keeling, 2013; Hallgarten, Tabberer & McCarthy, 2015; Hill, 2014).

Type B: These schools were established on an ideological framework with the mission of bringing young people from different parts of the world together for the purpose of promoting mutual understanding and global peace, vis-à-vis Nobel Laureate Lester B. Pearson, and based on the educational philosophy of Kurt Hahn (Hayden and Thompson, 2013; Van Oord, 2010).

Type C: These schools represent the most recent configuration of international schools, and perhaps the most confounding. Type C schools cannot be categorized as either Type A or B schools but appear to fit the definition of international school as established earlier. A distinctive feature of these schools is that they cater to fee-paying host country nationals, whose SES offers them the opportunity to access an education perceived to be of higher quality than that available in the national education system (Hayden and Thompson, 2013).



The Type C schools are typically privately owned and are operated on a for-profit basis (Brummit & Keeling, 2013; Haywood, 2015; MacDonald, 2009).

This research was conducted in Type A schools. There is significant room for further research on international schools of other types. The question of interest is does the type of international school have a qualitative impact on the process of strategic succession planning and management? If so, how?

- Internal Leadership Development, also euphemistically known as building bench strength or a leadership pipeline, is an emergent theme in this sample study. There is sufficient research depth and breadth on this phenomenon in the private sector and large national school boards to suggest this is one of many excellent tactics in a strategic succession plan. An area of interest to this researcher would be to what extent has bench strength been a factor in moderating the organizational disruption from leadership succession.
- Finally, the for-profit vs. not-for-profit international school dichotomy with respect to leadership succession is an area ready for a closer inspection. The profit motivation of each entity is a game-changer in the organizational life of each school. As a result, it would be logical to hypothesize that decisions relating to leadership in general, leadership succession, in particular, would be greatly affected by financial orientation.

## **Conclusion**

The average tenure of an international school director is 3.7 years (Benson, 2011). The number of international schools in operation as of May 2017 is 8,712 (ISC, 2017). Exactly one year prior, the number of operational international schools was 8178 (ISC, 2016). The projected growth of international schools by May 2022 is 12,100 (ISC, 2017). If this projection is accurate, the directors of the more than 3,000

new schools will come from somewhere, creating transition events in the former home of those newly appointed directors. This researcher experienced four unexpected succession events in three schools over an eight-year period. Unfortunately, at this point in time, there is not enough information available to know the exact number of unplanned or unmanaged leadership succession events. However, with some deductive logic and a handful of known quantities, the potential scale of the problem can be reasonably established. What is known at this moment is this: leadership succession will happen. This is the inescapable truth for every organization, including schools. Furthermore, with the unprecedented growth of international schools on a global scale, and with more to come, the time to understand the breadth and depth of the problem has come. This study is conceived in an earnest desire to better understand the phenomenon of leadership succession in the international school contexts, and in doing so, identify critical lessons on how to better manage these certain, and unsettling events.

What are the real dangers if strategic succession planning is not addressed? Are schools in danger of failure because the governing body neglected to plan for a succession event? Are students doomed to a state of chronic underachievement because their school's leadership lacked the foresight to secure a sound succession plan? No, yes, maybe...it is not possible to answer this question with a high degree of certainty at this point. The only real conclusion that can be established from this study is that when a school rationally and purposefully puts some degree of serious effort into crafting a short-term and long-term succession plan for its director, there appears to be a realistic expectation of a turbulence-free succession event. Ultimately, if the act of strategically managing succession events dampen the event turbulence in

all its forms and for the entire school community, then it is possible to conceive some quantifiable effect on student achievement.

The purpose of this study was to determine critical themes influencing leadership succession in international schools. By revealing these salient themes and making an attempt to better understand them in the contexts in which they emerge, along with the actions taken by the study schools and the consequences of those actions, it is possible to distill a handful of recommendations for crafting a strategic plan for succession. The goal is not to avoid succession. In fact, the goal is to expect and anticipate succession, manage the event at every level, and experience a turbulence-free leadership hand-over for the benefit of the student body, the faculty, staff, and parents.

Maya Angelou, an American poet, memoirist, actress and an important figure in the American Civil Rights Movement once stated, “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.” If this study has accomplished anything, it must be that it has exposed leadership succession in international schools as a long misunderstood and mismanaged problem. Nevertheless, this study also offers a viable pathway to resolving the problem of unanticipated and unmanaged leadership succession. Therefore, in the spirit of Miss Angelou’s powerful words, now that the problem is brought into the light, senior leadership in every international school must endeavour to do better.

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